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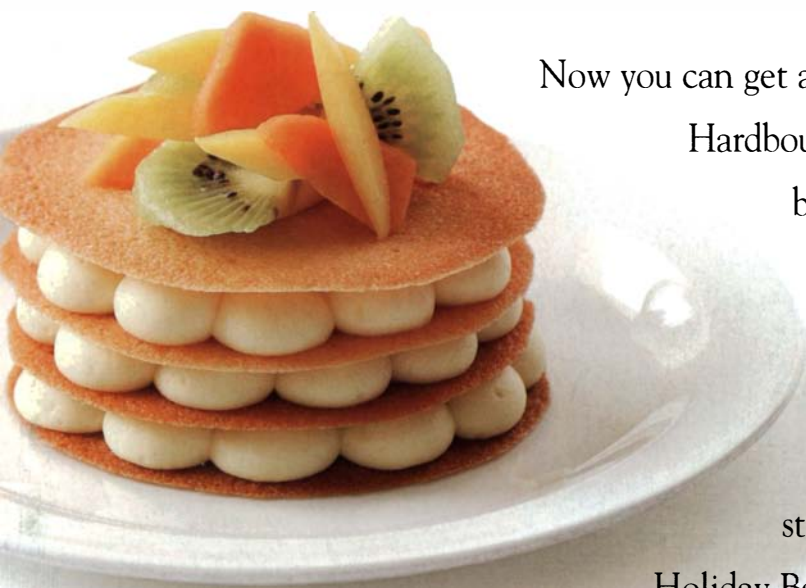


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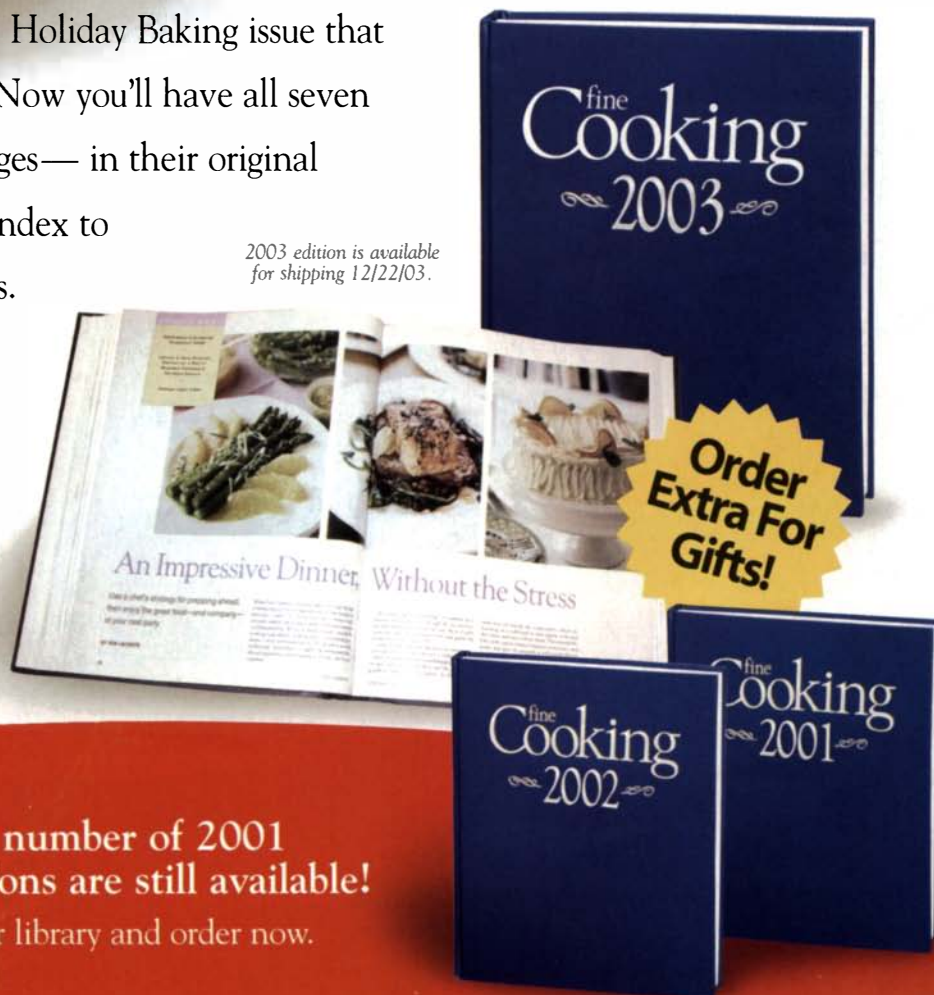
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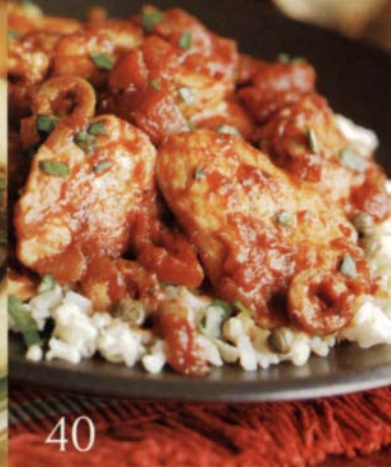
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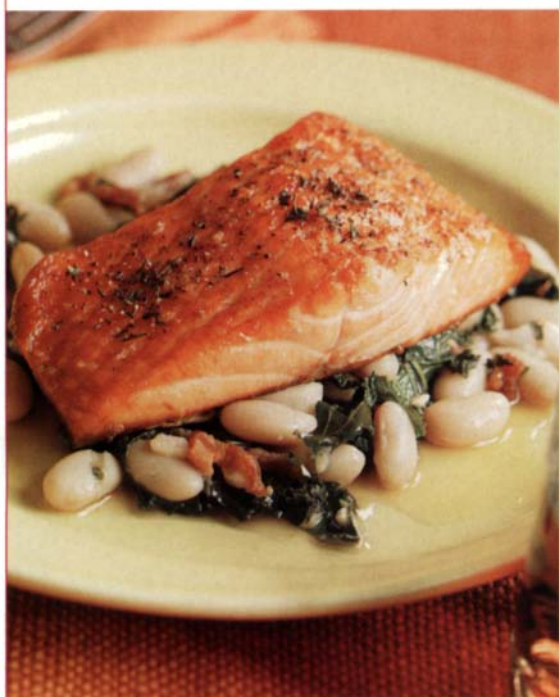


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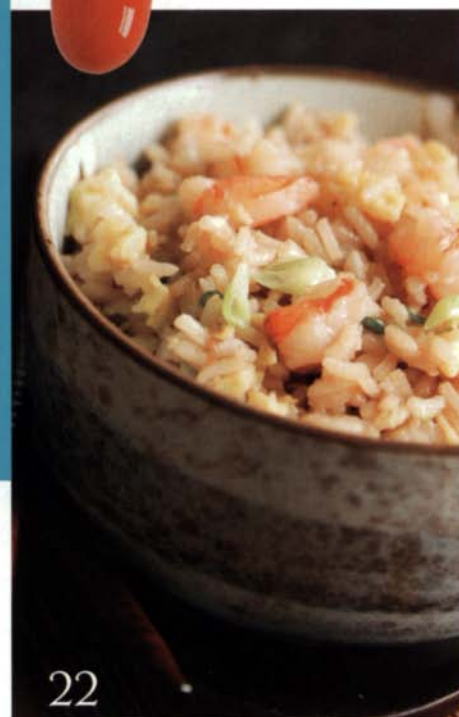
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"The only things that stick in this pan  
are wonderful, caramelized bits to deglaze."



Christine Keff  
Chef/Owner, *Flying Fish*  
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If you're a weekend warrior in the kitchen, you'll love all the dishes in this issue. A rich, deeply flavored beef stew you can customize to your liking, a lofty, crusty foccacia, and a really versatile marinara sauce are all great to make on Saturday or Sunday to use later in the week. And for all your weeknight cooking, we've got a great selection of simple main- and side-dish ideas paired up for you. Whether you're feeding two or twelve, these comforting winter dishes will please all. (Just remember to check the yields on the recipes, as you may need to double or halve them to suit your needs.)

## Weeknight Solutions

### Monday: Italian

**Mediterranean Sausage Ragoût, p. 55**

**Polenta with Parmesan, p. 44**

### Tuesday: French

**Rosemary Steak & Potatoes, p. 82C**

**Braised Carrots & Shallots, p. 47**

### Wednesday: Indian

**Chicken with Potatoes, Peas & Coconut-Curry Sauce, p. 43**

**Serve on a bed of long-grain rice (make extra for tomorrow's dinner)**

### Thursday: Chinese

**Shanghai Stir-Fried Beef & Broccoli, p. 82C**

**Shrimp Fried Rice, p. 22**

### Friday: Italian

**Linguine with Arrabbiata Sauce, p. 57**

**Serve with a salad of bitter greens**

## Casual Entertaining

### Make-Ahead

**Spinach & Parmesan Stuffed Mushrooms, p. 82C**

**Classic Beef Stew, p. 37**

**Ultimate Carrot Cake, p. 51**

### Last-Minute

**Broiled Salmon with a White Bean, Kale & Bacon Ragoût, p. 82C**

### Easy

**Maple-Thyme Roast Chicken, p. 82C**

**Spiced Couscous Pilaf with Almonds, Currants & Mint, p. 74**

**Silky Lemon Pudding, p. 65**



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# Happy Birthday, *Fine Cooking*!

We've just turned ten. It's hard to believe, but the evidence is right there on our bookshelves: 62 issues of *Fine Cooking*, starting with February/March 1994. In preparing for this anniversary issue, we've all been talking about what's happened over the years: all the amazing authors we've



worked with, the delicious food we've sampled, the thousands of recipes we've tested, and most of all, our readers.

Year after year, we've been energized by your feedback in so many ways, from the letters to the editor, to the face-to-face encounters at shows and classes around the country, to emails sharing your successes: pulling off your first big Thanksgiving, finally mastering risotto, getting raves from your friends for your flaky pie crust. Sometimes we get urgent phone calls when you're planning a special

meal and you've lost a recipe, and of course we always get pointed critiques from the rowdy gang on Cooks Talk, our online forum (log on and join them at [www.finecooking.com](http://www.finecooking.com)). However we hear from you, it's all good, because we love connecting with people who are as passionate about cooking as we are.

As a way to thank you and to celebrate, we've collected some of our favorite recipes from our first ten years. We polled readers and quizzed the staff for the recipes that they can't live without. The result is the special bonus mini cookbook you've found enclosed with your issue. We hope you enjoy it.

We're also marking our tenth anniversary by kicking off America's Best Home Cook contest, co-sponsored with Sur La Table cookware stores. It's our way of turning the spotlight on the people who we think are doing the most exciting cooking—you, the home cook. Turn to p. 24 to learn more about how to enter and about the great prizes, or go to [www.finecooking.com/contest](http://www.finecooking.com/contest).

—the staff of *Fine Cooking*

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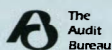
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**PAM ANDERSON** ("Beef Stew," p. 36) believes that many recipes are just variations on a simple technique and formula, and when you get familiar with the formula, you can cook based on what you have around and what's in season. Her method for making beef stew in this issue is a perfect example of that. Pam is the author of *The Perfect Recipe*, *How to Cook without a Book*, and *CookSmart*.

*Fine Cooking* test kitchen manager **JENNIFER ARMENTROUT** ("Chicken in a Flash," p. 40) just bought her first home. The kitchen is the biggest room in the house, a welcome change from the apartment kitchens she had before. She says she no longer wishes she could take one of the *Fine Cooking* test kitchens home with her at night, and sometimes she even looks forward to making dinner at home after a full day of cooking at work.

**ALAN TARDI** ("Polenta," p. 44) is a veteran of New York City restaurants, including Chanterelle, Lafayette, Le Madri, and his own restaurant, Follonico, where he was the chef and proprietor. In 2001, he closed the restaurant to move to Italy, where he now works in vineyards and wineries and writes about food and wine.

**JEAN-PIERRE MOUÏÉ** ("Braising Vegetables," p. 46) was the executive chef at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, for over 20 years and contributed to several Chez Panisse cookbooks. Jean-Pierre still works closely with Chez Panisse as a consultant and divides his time between Berkeley and Bordeaux, where he and his wife lead culinary and cultural tours of France; visit his site at [www.twobordelais.com](http://www.twobordelais.com).

**GREG CASE** ("Carrot Cake," p. 50) was a pastry chef at Dean &

DeLuca in New York City and at Hamersley's Bistro in Boston before setting up shop on his own. He's the pastry chef and owner of G. Case Baking, a retail and wholesale bakery in Somerville, Massachusetts.

**NANCY VERDE BARR** ("Marinara," p. 52) studied with Marcella Hazan and Madeleine Kamman, worked as an executive chef to Julia Child for 18 years, and has been a food consultant for various television programs. The author of *Make It Italian* and *We Called It Macaroni*, which were both nominated for James Beard awards, Nancy lives in Rhode Island, where she writes about Italian food.

While researching his new book *American Pie: My Search for the Perfect Pizza*, baker **PETER REINHART** learned the truth about his own focaccia. "I was in Genoa, Italy, the focaccia center of the universe, and I expected to be intimidated by the quality." Instead, he happily discovered that his own was just as good. No wonder we tapped him to write "Classic Focaccia," on p. 58. Peter is the award-winning author of six books on food and philosophy and is a full-time faculty member at Johnson & Wales University. He lives in Charlotte, North Carolina.

**LORI LONGBOTHAM** ("Lemon Desserts," p. 62) has rarely met a lemon she didn't like. A food journalist and cookbook author, Lori has been developing recipes and writing about food for over 25 years. She wrote *Luscious Lemon Desserts* and *Lemon Zest* and was a contributing editor to *The Dean & DeLuca Cookbook*. Her next book, *Luscious Chocolate Desserts*, is due out this spring. She lives in New York.



Lori Longbotham



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## Merlot with food

### Lighter Merlots

- ❖ grilled salmon
- ❖ roast chicken
- ❖ pasta with simple red sauce
- ❖ grilled vegetables

### Medium-weight to richer Merlots

- ❖ all red meats, lamb
- ❖ duck (avoid sweet sauces)
- ❖ roast pork
- ❖ Cheddar, Parmigiano, and other aged cheeses

## Merlot styles

### Lighter Merlots

- ❖ strawberry
- ❖ red raspberry
- ❖ herbs
- ❖ light oak
- ❖ soft tannins

### Medium-weight Merlots

- ❖ red and black fruits
- ❖ herbal elements
- ❖ smoky notes
- ❖ firmer tannins

### Richer Merlots

- ❖ dark fruits
- ❖ herbs
- ❖ baking spices
- ❖ pronounced new oak
- ❖ medium to robust tannins

# Getting to know Merlot

BY TIM GAISER

**W**ith its supple fruit and easy-drinking style, Merlot is probably the closest thing to a “comfort wine” I can think of. It’s also the most popular red wine in America. But oddly enough, for such a popular wine, Merlot doesn’t have a textbook style: while some are light, quaffable, and straightforward, others are rich, age-worthy, and complex. No worries. Here’s a guide to help you figure out which Merlots suit you best.

sult, there’s a lot of mediocre Merlot out there. But plenty of good ones can be found. Here’s a tour the world over.

**In France, Merlot’s best examples are from Bordeaux.** Merlot from Pomerol and Saint-Emilion are capable of true greatness, especially when blended with the Cabernet Franc grape. Châteaux such as Pétrus, Le Pin, Cheval Blanc, and Ausone are some of the greatest Merlot made anywhere—and some of the greatest red wines in the world, for that matter.

### Merlot across the globe

The Merlot grape grows best in cool climates. It doesn’t do as well in hot places because it ripens early and tends to show undesirable, cooked-fruit flavors if left on the vine too long.

Merlot plantings worldwide have risen dramatically over the last ten years. As a re-

**For everyday drinking,** look for good value from Bordeaux’s satellite communes such as Fronsac and Lalande-Pomerol. And outside of Bordeaux, Merlot is produced in enormous quantities in the Languedoc region, in southwest France. Though not as great (or expensive) as their Bordeaux cousins, the

## The Cabernet-Merlot connection

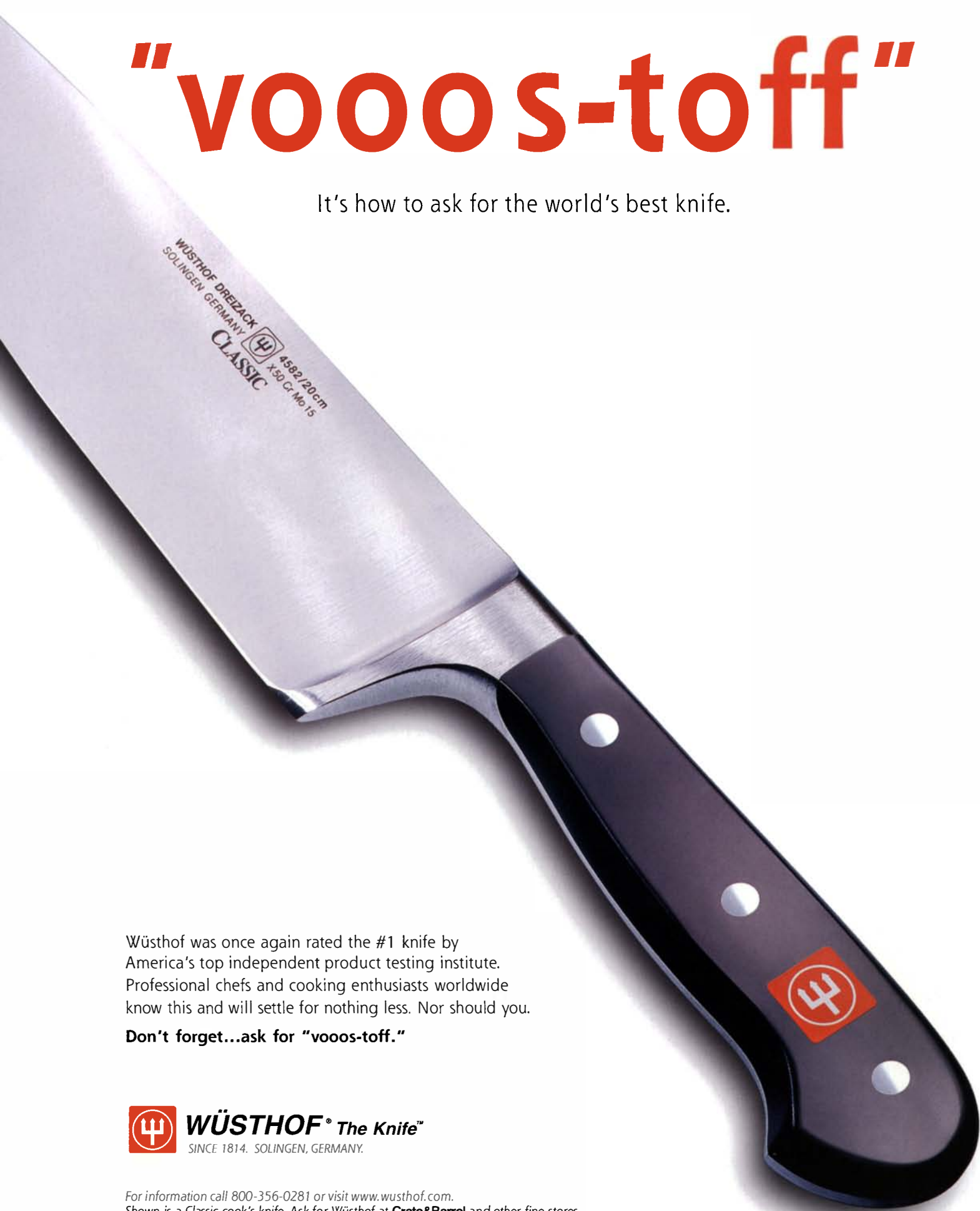
**W**ine drinkers commonly associate Merlot with Cabernet Sauvignon because the two grapes are often blended, with fleshy Merlot being used to soften the leaner, more tannic Cabernet, especially in Bordeaux. When bottled as a single varietal, Cabernet Sauvignon

tends to be a bigger, more concentrated wine with firmer tannins. Textbook Merlot, if there is such a thing, has lush fruit, softer tannins, and lower acidity than Cabernet, which is why it’s so appealing to a wide audience.



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best of these country Merlots offers a glass of succulent, ripe fruit and great value. Who could ask for more?

**In the U.S.,** Merlot from prestigious appellations such as Napa Valley and Sonoma County can be found in every style, from light and easy to rich, tannic reds that require a decade or more of aging. There's a California Merlot for every taste, but you need to be familiar with the producer's specific style to avoid the mediocre stuff (see our recommendations at right). With California Merlot, going a little higher on the price spectrum will often get you better quality.

**Washington State** produces many outstanding Merlots that boast ripe, intense black fruit flavors and bright acidity. Look for Washington Merlots bottled both as a single variety and in Cabernet blends. Both can be first rate.

**In Australia,** Merlot is the second most widely planted grape after Shiraz. Here the country's talented winemakers make juicy, fruit-forward wines in every price range that are long on flavor and good values. Also look for Merlot-Shiraz and Merlot-Cabernet blends.

**Argentina and Chile** have long been two of the better sources for value-priced Merlot. Bright, youthful fruits and supple textures characterize these wines, as does a touch of earthiness.



Merlot comes in  
such a wide  
range of styles  
that it defies  
stereotyping

## Merlots to savor

*Retail prices are approximate.*

### below \$15

- 2001 Fortant de France  
Vin de Pays d'Oc, \$7;  
medium weight
- 2000 Carmenet Cellar  
Selection Merlot,  
California, \$8; medium  
weight
- 2001 Blackstone Merlot,  
California, \$10; light, fruity
- 2000 Columbia Valley  
Merlot, Washington, \$10;  
light, fruity
- 2001 Trumpeter Merlot,  
Argentina, \$10; medium  
weight
- 2002 Jacob's Creek Merlot,  
Australia, \$11; light, fruity
- 2002 Casa Lapostolle Merlot,  
Chile, \$13; medium weight  
with some tannins

### above \$15

- 2001 Murphy-Goode Merlot,  
Alexander Valley, \$17; fruity  
but rich, with some tannins
- 2000 Swanson Merlot, Napa  
Valley, \$30; rich and robust
- 2000 L'Ecole No 41 Merlot,  
Washington, \$35; rich and  
robust
- 1999 Beringer Merlot  
Bancroft Ranch, Howell  
Mountain, \$74; one for the  
cellar
- 1999 Chateau L'Angélus,  
Saint-Emilion, \$80; another  
one for the cellar

*Tim Gaiser, a master sommelier, is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦*



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## What is “light” olive oil?

—Frank Millington, via email

**A Patricia Darragh replies:** It's easy to be deceived by this label. Light olive oil has the same amount of calories and fat as authentic olive oil but without the same flavor, aroma, and health attributes. It's essentially a marketing term. Because “light” can mean so many things, the USDA requires that importers include the word “flavored” to specify that it's lighter in flavor, not in calories or fat. Of course, you're likely to see this clarification in very small print.

In most cases, light olive oil is refined and consequently lacks flavor, or has a subtle flavor, similar to vegetable oil. The refining process does create a higher smoke point, making the oil well suited to high-heat sautéing or stir-frying. But the refining process also removes vitamins and polyphenols, thereby stripping the oil of the health benefits of authentic extra-virgin olive oil. If you're looking for an alternative to pure olive oil for high-heat cooking, try a canola oil that's expeller-pressed, meaning the oil has been extracted mechanically versus chemically.

*Patricia Darragh is the executive director of the California Olive Oil Council.*

## What do I do with leftover egg yolks after making something like an angel food cake? I hate to throw them away.

—Dione Sobin, via email

**A Shirley Corriher replies:** While there are plenty of recipes that make good use of leftover egg yolks—Hollandaise sauce, lemon curd (see the recipe on p. 66), custards like crème brûlée, and even some cakes (extra yolks make cakes terrifically moist)—I find that I'm usually looking to use them in something a little more spontaneous since egg yolks don't store long. I most often use them to make a creamy Caesar salad dressing, homemade mayonnaise (it's very quick to make in a blender), or, similarly, aioli (a strong-flavored, garlicky mayonnaise that's delicious dolloped on vegetables, meats, or fish). All of these benefit from the yolk's wonderful emulsifying properties. I also like to mix yolks in with whole eggs to make scrambled eggs, a frittata, or a strata; the extra yolks add richness and color.

To store leftover yolks, the American Egg Board recommends covering unbroken yolks with water, sealing in a container, and refrigerating them for no more than two days. I don't recommend freezing egg yolks because they become gelatinous.

For more ideas on how to use leftover yolks (or whites), there's a whole book dedicated to the subject: *The Other Half of the Egg*, by Helen McCully, Jacques Pépin, and William North Jayme. It's out of print, but I often see it in used book stores.

*Shirley O. Corriher, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is a contributing author to the American Egg Board's “Eggyclopedia.”*

## Is it all right to use a garlic clove if it has a green shoot in the center?

—Matt Singer, via email

**A Robert Danhi replies:** The sprout is safe to eat—and generally inoffensive, if at times slightly bitter. But, more important, the presence of the little

green shoot is a sign that the garlic clove's flavor has begun to deteriorate, typically becoming more pungent. In sum, the garlic is past its prime. If I don't want to run to the store to buy a fresh head of garlic, I'll use the tip of a paring or chef's knife to remove the shoot, which can discolor a sauce.

*Robert Danhi, formerly an instructor at the Culinary Institute of America, is the executive chef of Two Chefs on a Roll in Los Angeles.*

## What's the best way to clean the residue that forms on a nonstick pan?

—Joyce Leifer, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania

**A Cecelia Steele responds:** Simply washing your nonstick pans with hot, soapy water after each use is the best way to prevent residue buildup. A dishcloth or sponge is usually all it takes to get the surface thoroughly clean. If oil or food residue is left on the pan, further cooking will harden the residue and cause sticking over time. If your pan has “carbonized,” meaning a thin film of oil has baked onto the pan, you'll need to use a little more elbow grease to break through the carbonized layer. If you need a little extra oomph in your cleaning, use a nonabrasive cleaner or a soft-scrub cleanser, or look for sponges and cleaning pads that indicate on the label that they're safe for nonstick pans.

*Cecelia Steele is the marketing communications manager for Teflon Non-Stick Surfaces. ♦*

Do you have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by email to [fc@taunton.com](mailto:fc@taunton.com), and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.



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# Rating Digital Timers

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL

In our test kitchen, it seems like there's always a timer beeping, as usually more than one recipe is being tested at the same time. But for any cook—not just a recipe tester—a timer can be a crucial tool to a recipe's success.

The latest digital timers offer significant improvements over manual ones: The alarm of a digital timer is much more relentless (not just a brief ring), and the timing is typically more accurate (spring-loaded manual timers aren't always exact). That said, digital timers vary significantly in many tiny details that can make them really handy or really annoying (see the box at right).

We tested 17 digital timers that were representative of the various styles of timers and the various features they can offer. One model stood out as our all-around favorite, and we recommend five others for their general ease of use or for specific features we considered valuable (see p. 78 for sources). Unfortunately, our tests couldn't measure battery life. Our experience in the test kitchen, however, is that digital timers run a long while before the batteries die.



## All-time favorite

**Polder Electronic Clock, Timer and Stopwatch (model 898-90)**

**average price: \$12.99**

**MODES:** timer, clock, and stopwatch with magnet and string

**ALARM DURATION:** 1 minute

**MEMORY RECALL:** yes

**TIMER RANGE:** 9 hours, 59 minutes, 59 seconds

**PROS:** A numeric keypad lets you quickly plug in the exact time, down to the second: no scrolling required. Light and narrow, this timer's operation is straightforward and its alarm unmistakably loud. When magnetically mounted, the timer stays firmly in place as buttons are pressed.

**CON:** When walking around with this timer in your pocket or hung around your neck, it's easy to accidentally shut it off if it brushes against another object. The beeping of the push buttons is quite loud (almost harsh) when setting, starting, and stopping the timer.



## Runner-up

**Galleon Digital Count Up/Down Timer (Williams-Sonoma model 17283)**

**average price: \$15**

**MODES:** timer and stopwatch with clip, magnet, stand, and hanger

**ALARM DURATION:** 1 minute

**MEMORY RECALL:** yes

**TIMER RANGE:** 9 hours, 59 minutes, 59 seconds

**PROS:** This timer functions much like the winning Polder model, with a numeric keypad to punch in exact times. When magnetically mounted, the unit won't wobble no matter which buttons you press.

**CONS:** While this timer can fit into a shirt pocket or clip onto a waistband, it's not so compact that we'd be inclined to use it that way.

## Features of an ideal timer

While not all of the timers we recommend here offered each of these features, these are our ideals:

- ❖ **Number pads.** This allows quick, precise time setting and eliminates the tedium of scrolling.
- ❖ **Alarm duration.** The longer the better. One minute is preferable to 30 seconds, but 30 seconds

is better than the momentary ring of most manual timers.

- ❖ **Memory recall.** This displays the last time set on the timer; ideal when baking batches of cookies.
- ❖ **Single-button clearing.** One button is designated to clear the readout.
- ❖ **Alarm count-up.** The display counts up as soon as the alarm

sounds and, preferably, continues to count up after the alarm's duration. This is great when you've missed the alarm and need to know how much time has elapsed.

- ❖ **Magnet stability.** Too many timers wobbled or fell to the ground as we tried to set them while they were magnetically mounted.





## A real wake-up call

**Oregon Scientific**  
(model TR118)  
average price: \$16.95

**MODES:** double timer, clock, and stopwatch with clip, magnet, and stand

**ALARM DURATION:** 1 minute

**MEMORY RECALL:** yes

**TIMER RANGE:** 99 hours, 59 minutes, 59 seconds

**PROS:** This no-nonsense double timer's alarm is distinctively loud and punctuated, reminiscent of an alarm clock. The digits are relatively large (about 2cm) and thus easy to see, as is a symbol indicating which one of the two timers (T1 or T2) is being displayed. The alarm turns off when any button is pressed.

**CONS:** You can use both timers simultaneously, but the display only shows the status of one at a time. This timer requires scrolling.

## Easiest to read



**BonJour Large Readout**  
**Chef's Kitchen Timer**  
(#8125)

average price: \$14.99

**MODES:** timer with magnet and stand

**ALARM DURATION:** 30 seconds

**MEMORY RECALL:** yes

**TIMER RANGE:** 99 minutes, 59 seconds

**PROS:** Jumbo (3.5 and 2cm) digits make it easy to read from across the room. Its operation is self-explanatory and user friendly. If you aren't looking for extras, this timer is refreshingly simple.

**CONS:** The time range is short and thus not well suited for long roasting and other slow-cooking techniques. The digital display doesn't count up once time elapses. There is no "clear" button—the minute and second buttons must be pressed simultaneously to clear the readout. Scrolling is required.



## Ultimate multi-tasker

**Polder Triple Kitchen**  
**Timer/Clock (model 891)**  
average price: \$19.99

**MODES:** triple timer, clock, and stopwatch with magnet

**ALARM DURATION:** 1 minute

**MEMORY RECALL:** yes

**TIMER RANGE:** 19 hours, 59 minutes, 59 seconds

**PROS:** For a timer that can simultaneously monitor four tasks (three timers and one stopwatch), it's surprisingly straightforward to operate. Each timer has a distinct alarm (the first has a single repeated beat, the second a double beat, and so on).

**CONS:** The alarm is only moderately loud. If you're not apt to use this timer to its full capacity, the extras might just get in the way. Scrolling is required.



## Fail-safe portability

**CDN On a Rope Digital**  
**Timer (model TR3)**  
average price: \$12.99

**MODES:** timer and stopwatch with magnet, clip, and string

**ALARM DURATION:** 30 seconds

**MEMORY RECALL:** yes

**TIMER RANGE:** 99 minutes, 59 seconds

**PROS:** The feature that sold us on this timer is a safety lock at the top. If you engage the lock—a switch at the top of the

timer—you can't accidentally turn off the timer. It's compact and extremely light.

**CONS:** The time range is short. The display doesn't show seconds, nor does it count up once time elapses. The buttons for setting the time are tiny and don't project from the timer's face, making it difficult for larger fingers to operate. The timer beeps continuously as you scroll to set the time.

*The following timers were also reviewed for this article (model numbers listed in parentheses): BonJour Multi-Time Triple Timer with Clock (8130); BonJour Quickset Timer (8100); Cooper Chef's Timer (TS100); Cooper 24-hour Digital Timer (FT24); KitchenAid Digital Timer; Salter (egg shaped) Electronic Timer (323); Salter Electric Clock/Timer (330); Taylor Professional Big Digit Timer (5803); Taylor Pro Kitchen Digital Timer (5801); Taylor Pro Kitchen Large Readout Timer (5802); West Bend Clock/Triple Electronic Timer (40053).*

*Maryellen Driscoll is*  
*Fine Cooking's*  
*editor at large.* ♦



## Shrimp Fried Rice

### a Classic from China

BY EILEEN YIN-FEI LO

Is there a Chinese dish as well known as fried rice? I doubt it. The technique of stir-frying cooked rice with a combination of meat, fish, or vegetables appears in all of China's regional cuisines, north to south, east to west—a testament to rice's importance as a staple food.

Rice is at the core of virtually every Chinese meal. To be invited as a guest to dine is to be asked to *sik fan*, or “eat rice.” If a family is well provided for, its rice bowl is said to be full; if needy, its rice bowl is empty. In my girlhood home outside of Canton, we had a large lacquered container filled with raw rice, and written on the outside were the characters *seung moon*, or “always filled.”

The Chinese have devised dozens of ways to prepare rice: It's steamed, dry-roasted, and cooked in clay pots; it's made into cakes, noodles, dumplings, pastries, stuffings, and porridge-like congees. Mostly, however, it's stir-fried in a wok.

The most classic version of this most classic Chinese dish is Yangzhou fried rice, which includes shrimp, barbecued pork, scallions, scrambled eggs, ginger, and garlic (the recipe at right is for this dish, but I've left out the pork). But this dish has countless variations. You can use Chinese sausage, dried scallops, beef, and even untraditional ingredients like sun-dried tomatoes. There are no limits to invention, as long as you cook it properly. The keys to perfect fried rice are simple:

❖ **Leftover cooked rice works best** because it tends to absorb less oil. It also separates into individual grains better.

❖ **A very hot pan prevents sticking.** A well-seasoned carbon-steel wok is the ideal choice, but if you don't have one, use a large stainless-steel skillet.

❖ **Don't overcook the eggs.** They should be soft-scrambled and still slightly moist. They'll continue to cook when they get tossed with the rice.

## Shrimp Fried Rice

Serves four to six.

Unless you're shopping in a Chinatown liquor store, it's hard to find a good-quality white rice wine. Most supermarkets and even Chinese food markets offer only “cooking wines,” and these tend to be of poor quality. If that's all you can find, use gin instead.

- 2 tablespoons soy sauce**
- 2 tablespoons Chinese white rice wine or gin**
- 1 tablespoon oyster sauce**
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar**
- 2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil**
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon table salt; more to taste**
- White pepper, freshly ground if possible**
- 3 large eggs**
- 3 tablespoons peanut oil**
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons minced fresh ginger**
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons minced garlic (3 to 4 cloves)**
- $\frac{1}{2}$  pound shrimp, shelled, deveined, and cut into  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch pieces**
- 3 cups cooked extra-long-grain white rice, at room temperature (from 1 cup raw rice)**
- 3 scallions, trimmed, white and green parts finely sliced (to yield  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup)**

**Have all your ingredients prepared and at hand before cooking so you can move quickly once you start stir-frying.**

In a small bowl, mix the soy sauce, rice wine or gin, oyster sauce, sugar, sesame oil,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt, and a pinch of white pepper. In another small bowl, beat the eggs with  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt and a pinch of white pepper.

Heat a 12-inch skillet or large wok over high heat for 45 seconds. Swirl 1 tablespoon of the peanut oil in the pan to coat the bottom. Add the eggs and scramble them gently with a spatula as they cook until they're still a little soft and loose. Remove from the heat and cut the egg into small pieces with the spatula; it will finish cooking as you do this. Transfer to a bowl.

Wipe the pan and spatula clean with paper towels. Heat the pan over high heat for 45 seconds. Pour in the remaining 2 tablespoons peanut oil and swirl to coat the pan. Add the ginger and garlic. Stir constantly with the spatula until the garlic is light brown, about 10 seconds. Immediately add the shrimp; stir constantly until it's opaque, about 1 minute. Add the cooked rice. Cook, stirring constantly, for 2 minutes. Reduce the heat to low. Stir the soy sauce mixture and then drizzle it over the rice. Stir well to completely coat the rice and mix the ingredients. Add the scrambled egg and mix well. Add the scallions and mix well. Taste and add salt if necessary. Transfer the rice to a bowl and serve.

**If possible, use leftover rice and bring it to room temperature. If using freshly made rice, let it cool first.**



## Essentials for the Chinese kitchen

For sources for all these ingredients, see p. 78.

### Sesame oil

Sesame oil is an aromatic oil made from pressed (and often, toasted) sesame seeds. Its nutty fragrance and toasty flavor adds an exotic note to many dishes and is a fine addition to sauces and dressings. Asian sesame oil tends to be thicker and darker than those from the Middle East. I prefer the former for its more intense flavor; it's usually in the Asian foods section of the supermarket. I don't recommend using the darker type as a cooking oil, though, as it tends to burn easily and, like a fine extra-virgin olive oil, its nuances evaporate with the heat. Instead, I use dark sesame oil as a finishing condiment, adding it to stir-fries at the last minute or drizzling it over steamed fish or into hot and sour soup. The oil can turn rancid quickly, but if kept away from heat and light, an opened bottle should last at least four months.

### Oyster sauce

This thick, mahogany-colored sauce is made from ground oysters that have been boiled and dried. Oyster sauce is a necessity in the Chinese kitchen, not only for its distinctive taste, but for the rich, dark color it gives to dishes. I reach for it almost every time I cook a Chinese meal, whether it's for a fish marinade, a pork barbecue, or a sauce. Supermarket oyster sauces are often overly sweet (they contain a lot of corn syrup), and to compensate, you'll probably need to season the finished rice with more salt. Once opened, the sauce keeps indefinitely in the refrigerator.



### Soy sauce

Soy sauce has been a staple of the Chinese kitchen for 3,000 years. It's made from soybeans that have been fermented with wheat, and it comes in several styles, from thick and dark to thin and light. All have their uses: Meats benefit from a dark soy sauce; fish are enhanced by lighter, sweeter soys. I prefer Chinese soy sauces, which tend to have a higher ratio of soybeans to wheat and tend to be less salty.

### Rice

Rice in China can be short, medium, long, or extra-long grain. It can be glutinous (or "sticky"), white, black, or red. For authentic fried rice, choose extra-long-grain rice. If you can't find the extra-long, regular long-grain white rice also works. Just avoid short- and medium-grain rices, which get sticky and clumpy once cooked. That's fine for some applications, but for making perfect fried rice, you want to start out with cooked rice in which all the grains are separate.

Eileen Yin-Fei Lo is the consultant chef of the China Institute and a Chinese cooking instructor at the New School, both in New York City. Her most recent book is *The Chinese Chicken Cookbook*. ♦



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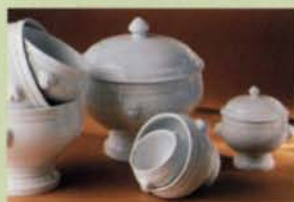


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READER SERVICE NO. 16

# Taking the Heat of the Fiery Chile

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER

**W**hether you're a certified chile-head or more of a chile-phobe, adding hot peppers to a dish can seem a bit chancy: Maybe they'll add a gentle tingle, or maybe they'll set your mouth on fire. Uncertainty is always part of the game when working with chiles, but controlling (or unleashing) the burn is a little easier when you understand the anatomy and chemistry of this fiery fruit.

## Chile lovers are made, not born

The "hot" in hot chiles comes from a chemical commonly known as capsaicin. But capsaicin isn't the sole culprit behind chiles' heat. The fruits actually produce about 14 pungent compounds, called capsaicinoids. The exact blend of capsaicinoids differs from one type of chile to another, which is why different chile varieties burn in different ways. For example, habaneros seem to sponta-

neously combust in your mouth, and jalapeños slowly smolder.

When you bite into a dish containing chiles, capsaicin triggers a burst of a chemical (called substance P, as in pain) that sends pain messages to your brain. If you eat a lot of chiles, these pain messages will subside, your tolerance will rise, and you'll be able to enjoy hotter and hotter food. That's how chileheads are made.

But chile tolerance isn't permanent. If you stop eating chiles for a while, you'll have to suffer the burn all over again. Don't worry, though, there are remedies to get through it.

## Milk, not water, eases the pain

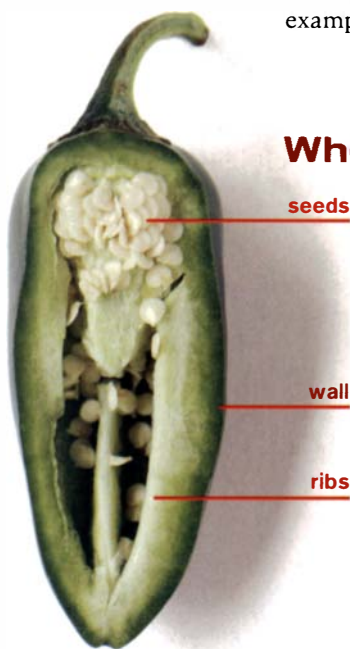
When your mouth is on fire from overdosing on chiles, your first instinct may be to reach for water. But resist: Water won't relieve the agony; it will just spread the capsaicin compounds—and the pain—around in

your mouth. In 1989, John Riley, editor of the journal *Solanaceae*, found that milk is more effective at relieving the sting. It appears that casein, a protein in milk, acts as a detergent and strips capsaicin from the nerves sending those pain messages. In fact, any product that contains casein can bring relief: sour cream, yogurt, even ice cream. Another study done one year later found that room-temperature sugar water was as effective as cold milk. This may explain why some cooks say that sugar can reduce the heat in a dish that is excessively hot.

## Adding heat is easier than removing it

When it comes to cooking with chiles, chile experts say that capsaicin is very stable—heat doesn't destroy it, freezing doesn't wipe it out, even acids don't seem to neutralize it (although acids do have some effect; the vinegar in Tabasco sauce, for instance, helps preserve its heat). "The main things that determine the heat of a dish are the pungency of the chile and the amount of chile you use," says Dave DeWitt, who has written more than 30 books on chiles. So if you're trying to minimize chiles' heat, a good place to start is to choose a variety with a heat level on the lower end of the scale (see the sidebar at right) and then proceed with caution, starting with a small amount and tasting as you go. "You have to look at heat like you look at salt," says Dr. Paul Bosland, director of the Chile Pepper Institute. "Too much salt can ruin a dish. So can too much heat."

*Shirley O. Corriher is the author of CookWise. ♦*



## Where the heat is

seeds

wall

ribs

Seeds don't make chiles hot—the fire comes from tiny capsaicin glands between the pod wall and the white spongy ribs. When you cut a chile, you rupture these glands, and capsaicin spills out onto the seeds, which is why they seem to contain the heat. To minimize the release of capsaicin, make one cut through the chile, rake out the ribs and seeds, and rinse the chile well.



**How hot is hot?** When chile connoisseurs talk about the heat levels of chiles, they toss around really big numbers. These are Scoville heat units (SHU), and they describe pungency on a scale from 0 to over 500,000 units. In the supermarket, you might see chiles ranked on a simpler 0 to 10 scale (🔥). The table below provides both numbers, but keep in mind that many factors, from genetics to growing conditions, will affect the heat of an individual chile. That's why the jalapeño you bought yesterday might be a lot tamer than the one you get today.



Source: The Chile Pepper Institute,  
New Mexico State University

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## WINNING TIP

### An easier way to sweat eggplant

Recipes often call for salting eggplant slices and placing a weight atop them to squeeze out the bitter juices. This can be a hassle if you're preparing more than one eggplant. That's why I use a slightly different method: I cut the eggplant into slices as usual and salt them heavily on one side only. Then I reassemble the eggplant, so that the slices are stacked together with layers of salt between. Next, I wrap the whole eggplant tightly in plastic wrap and let it sit. The eggplant quickly starts releasing juice. After 15 minutes or so, I unwrap the plastic and rinse the slices with water. No mess, no big containers or colanders to wash. Whether you're preparing many eggplant or just a few, this is a very simple procedure.

—Dr. Salete Newton,  
Norman, Oklahoma

### A prize for the best tip

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### Removing extra juice from Tarte Tatin

As Martha Holmberg pointed out in her recipe for foolproof tarte Tatin, from *Fine Cooking* #60 (p. 62), the apple halves give off lots of juice as they caramelize in the skillet. Instead of holding the apples back with a spatula while pouring the excess juice and caramel into a separate pan, as Ms. Holmberg suggested, I used a Pyrex turkey baster to remove the extra juice. It was extremely easy. My family really enjoyed the finished tarte.

—Natalie Victor,  
Huntington Woods, Michigan

### Discard used cooking oil without mess

Before I pan-fry chicken breasts or veal cutlets, I dredge them in flour that I've placed in a square "plate" of aluminum foil with the edges turned up. After frying the meat, I let the used oil cool and

then I pour it onto the remaining flour in the aluminum-foil plate. The flour absorbs most of the oil, allowing me to fold up the foil and discard it in the trash.

—Frank Guadagnini,  
Huntington Beach, California

### Torch the skin off peppers without cooking them

I love the taste of bell peppers, cooked or raw. What I don't like, though, is the texture of their skin. Many recipes call for roasting peppers prior to removing their skin, but this isn't very helpful if you want to use the pepper raw. I've found an easy technique for removing the skin without cooking the pepper. I set my peppers on an unlit barbecue grill and burn the skin with my kitchen propane torch. It takes only about 20 seconds to completely blacken the skin. Then I pop the torched peppers into a plastic bag to sweat for a few

minutes before scrubbing off the skin under cold running water.

—Jim Gerber,  
Koloa, Hawaii

### Melon baller doubles as caper spoon

For a convenient caper spoon, I use my double-ended melon baller. The smaller end fits into most caper jars, and the hole in the bottom of the scoop lets the brine drain out.

—Bob Bollinger,  
Eugene, Oregon

### Keeping a crisp crust on leftover pizza and quiche

In my quest to achieve a crisp crust on leftover pizza or quiche, I've tried several techniques: Reheating in the oven tends to dry out the toppings or filling. Wrapping the pizza or quiche in foil keeps them moist, but ruins the crust. Microwaving ruins the

(Continued on p. 32)



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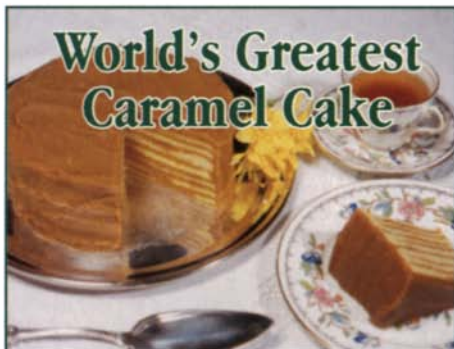
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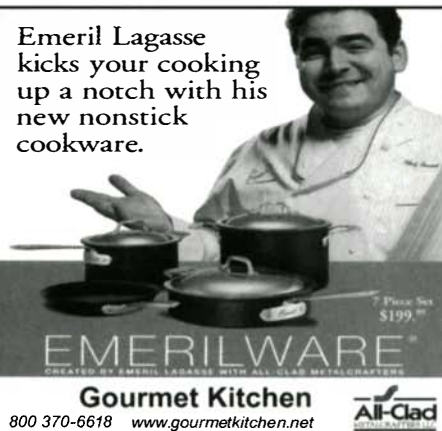
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crust, too. But if you reheat the leftovers in a nonstick skillet or sauté pan (with no oil) set over low heat, the crust always get crisp and neither pizza nor quiche dries out in the process.

—Gary Noll,  
Northwoods, Illinois

## Fresh-baked cookies at a moment's notice

When I make cookies, I always make at least a double batch of dough. I bake up however many cookies I need for that day, and I roll the rest of the dough into a long tube shape and wrap it in parchment and then plastic, and freeze it. When I need more cookies, I simply pull out my tube of cookie dough, slice off as many as I need and bake. It's a great time saver, and the taste and smell of freshly baked cookies is well worth the effort.

—Martha Brenneiser,  
via e-mail

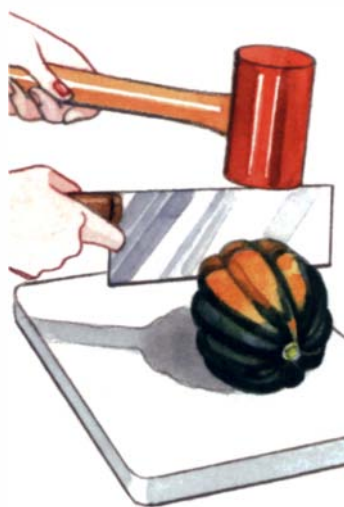
## A nut-toasting shortcut

While preparing to toast nuts, I put a baking sheet in the oven before turning the oven on to heat. When I spread the nuts on the heated pan, they brown evenly and quickly.

—Annette Whipple,  
Ventura, California

## Make your own cupcake liners

While preparing batter for cupcakes one day, I discovered I had no liners for my muffin pan. So I cut a piece of aluminum foil into small squares and molded each square on the outside of a muffin pan. Then I inserted the molded foils into the muffin cups and filled them with batter. The cupcakes baked beautifully, and the



## Cleave winter squash without fear

Chopping uncooked winter squash can be difficult. A cleaver is a good tool for the job, but using one adds an unwelcome element of danger. To make this task safer and easier, I set the cleaver blade into the skin of the squash and then lightly tap the cleaver with a medium-size rubber mallet. This technique lets me control how quickly the blade enters the squash and saves my hands a lot of hard work, too.

—Sue Grieshaber,  
St. Louis, Missouri

foil peeled right off each cupcake. I was using angel food cake batter so I didn't grease the foil, but for other kinds of cake batter, I would spray the foil with cooking spray.

—Pamela Jewett,  
Reno, Nevada

## Chop flat chocolate bars in no time

I use this technique when I want to break up a thin chocolate bar for baking. Lightly loosen the wrapper, then whack it in several places with a rolling pin, turning the pin. Unwrap the chocolate to check your progress. If you need smaller pieces, just rewrap the bar and continue hitting it with the rolling pin. If it's warm in your kitchen and the chocolate has softened, put the wrapped chocolate in the refrigerator for 10 minutes to firm it.

—Claire Larrabee, via email

## Taming raw onions

To take the sting out of sliced or chopped raw onions, I soak them in cool water for an hour before adding them to my salads. The onions become very sweet.

—Eleanor Genuardi,  
Corona Del Mar, California

## Secure chicken legs with a paper clip

Whenever I roast a whole turkey or chicken, I can never find string to secure the legs. So instead, I unfold a large paper clip so that it resembles a large square 'C.' I then secure the legs by bending the clip around the legs and pushing the clip's ends into the meat at a 45-degree angle. It's quick and easy, and I don't have to worry about string or scissors.

—Bob Simms,  
Granada Hills, California

## Getting a firm grip on clear skin

I'd like to add to Dolores Hart's tip about the importance of removing "clear skin" from spareribs in *Fine Cooking* #60. After inserting a finger between the skin and bone, I grasp the skin with a paper towel (instead of bare fingers) and pull. The paper helps me get a firm grip on the slick skin, which then comes right off.

—Isabelle Wolters,  
Scituate, Massachusetts ♦



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# Silicone in the kitchen

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Versatile, heat-resistant, and safe for nonstick surfaces, these pliable tools simplify stirring, whisking, scraping, and more.

## Kitchen mitt with a twist

Because they offer superior protection against wet heat, silicone oven mitts are a useful alternative to cloth ones. Not only can they keep out hot liquids, but the ridged grips give you a sturdier grasp on pot handles. Wearing these mitts, we felt more confident lifting a cheese-cake from a hot water bath and lifting a turkey from a roasting pan. *Silicone Zone Kitchen Mitt*, \$18 at [Cookscorner.com](http://Cookscorner.com) (800-236-2433).

## A neater spatula

We've all had spatulas leave giant saucy splotches on the counter, but the Oxo large silicone spatula practically eliminates this problem. A nifty extension built into the neck keeps the head off of the counter, minimizing mess. The silicone head, heat resistant to 600°F, won't scratch nonstick cookware and bakeware, so go ahead and use it for risottos or sautés. \$8.99 at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

## Silicone scraper does double duty

This bowl scraper boasts two edges, round and square, so it can maneuver easily into the curves of a bowl or swipe thoroughly across a cutting board. Comfortable to hold and flexible enough to slip into corners, it made fast work of scraping cake batter from a bowl and coaxing bread dough onto a sheet pan. \$6.95 at [Crateandbarrel.com](http://Crateandbarrel.com) (800-967-6696).



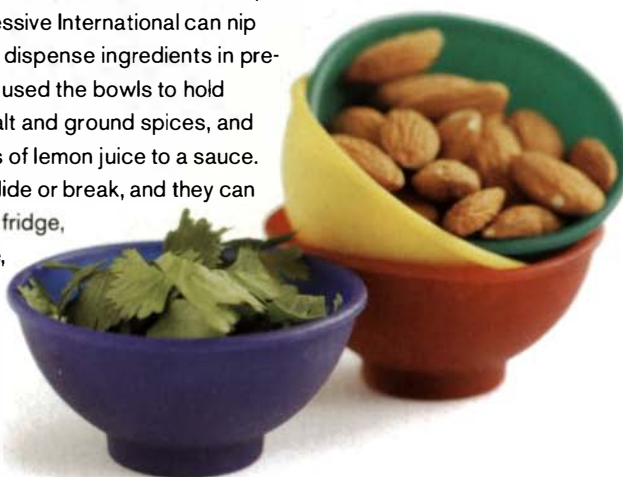
## A speedy whisk that's quiet, too

Its curved handle is very comfortable to grip, but that's not all we liked about Le Creuset's balloon whisk. Its silicone coating means it won't scrape noisily while whisking or scratch ceramic bowls, and it also makes the whisk easy to clean: The silicone covers any would-be crevices, so food particles can't get stuck. 10-inch whisk, \$16.95 at [Broadway Panhandler](http://BroadwayPanhandler.com) (866-266-5927).




## Pinch bowls for measured pouring

Unlike other small containers, these colorful pinch bowls from Progressive International can nip inward, letting you dispense ingredients in precise amounts. We used the bowls to hold chopped herbs, salt and ground spices, and to add a few drops of lemon juice to a sauce. The bowls won't slide or break, and they can be tossed into the fridge, freezer, microwave, or dishwasher. \$5.99 for four at [Kitchenetc.com](http://Kitchenetc.com) (800-232-4070).





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# How to Make a Rich &

BY PAM ANDERSON



**Author's tip:** The vegetables for the stew are best cooked separately and stirred in toward the end of cooking. Added any sooner, they'd lose their flavor to the stew.

**G**ood cooking depends a lot on creativity. But it has a formulaic side, too, and sometimes knowing and following a formula can help you be more effective in your creative cooking. My method for making beef stew is a perfect example of this. I'll use a formula to whip up a full-flavored classic stew with carrots, turnips, and peas, and I'll use that same formula to make a stew with whatever I feel like making or have on hand, like a spicy Southwestern beef stew with bell peppers and squash.

**The formula is simple:** 3 pounds beef, 3 cups onions, 3 garlic cloves, 3 tablespoons flour, 3 cups liquid, 4 cups vegetables, 1 seasoning combination, and 3 tablespoons parsley. Regardless of the vegetables you use or whether you use white or red wine (or no wine at all) as a liquid, the cooking method, outlined on pp. 38–39, remains the same.

## **Tenderize the beef at high heat**

I once believed the best, beefiest-flavored, and most tender stews were simmered slowly. But after modifying a technique I discovered in *The New Making of a Cook*, by Madeleine Kamman, I'm convinced that high heat can deliver a tender, rich, succulent beef stew in half the time.

Start by choosing a pot or Dutch oven with a tight-fitting lid. The pan's diameter is key: It should be no more than 9 to 11 inches. If it's wider, the stewing liquid reduces too quickly. For the best flavor, sear the beef well, as all that lovely browned flavor gets passed on to the stewing liquid. Before putting the stew in the oven, press heavy-duty foil into the pot and crimp it around the rim; top with the pot's lid. Cooked in a 450°F oven, the beef will become tender in an hour and 15 minutes.

Most of us are taught that beef stew must cook over low, slow heat. So why





# Flavorful Beef Stew

Follow a simple formula to make this classic stew with carrots, turnips, and peas, or create a unique beef stew with your own vegetable and flavor choices



## Author's favorites:

Here are a few great flavor and vegetable combinations (turn the page for details).

SEASONING: Classic

LIQUID: Red wine

VEGETABLES: Carrots, turnips, and peas

SEASONING: Southwestern

LIQUID: Tomatoes and wine

VEGETABLES: Yellow squash and green and red bell peppers (pinto beans optional)

SEASONING: Hungarian

LIQUID: Red wine

VEGETABLES: Red bell peppers, mushrooms, and pearl onions

SEASONING: Curry

LIQUID: Orange juice and wine

VEGETABLES: Sweet potatoes, green peas, and chickpeas

SEASONING: Italian

LIQUID: Tomatoes and wine

VEGETABLES: Zucchini, eggplant, and white beans



# Making your own beef stew

*Serves six to eight.*

does this high-heat method work? Dr. Melvin Hunt, professor of Animal Science at Kansas State University, explains that the tough connective tissue (known as collagen) that's common to stew beef can break down at high temperatures, too, and—as an added benefit—in a shorter period of time provided it's cooked under high-moisture conditions. That's why the tight foil cover is key: It holds in the moisture needed for the collagen to gelatinize, resulting in fork-tender beef.

## Cook the vegetables separately

I can't think of many vegetables that aren't good in stew. I do find, however, that it's best to cook them separately and stir them in toward the end of cooking. Added any sooner, the vegetables lose their flavor to the stew and dilute the rich, straightforward beef flavor in the gravy.

I recommend sautéing or steaming the vegetables just until tender. I usually sauté delicate vegetables like mushrooms and peppers and steam sturdier ones like carrots, turnips, and sweet potatoes. Thawed frozen green peas and canned beans, such as pintos, need no advance cooking.

After cooking the vegetables, I stir them into the piping hot stew as it comes out of the oven and let them sit in the covered pot for several minutes to let the flavors meld.



**Author's tip:**  
Speed up cooking by covering the stew with foil pressed almost directly onto its surface. Covered with a tight lid and cooked in a 450°F oven, the beef will be tender in an hour and 15 minutes.

## What you'll need

- 3 pounds boneless beef chuck** (for buying tips, see *From Our Test Kitchen*, p. 70)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 3 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil; more as needed**
- 3 cups diced yellow onions** (about 2 medium)
- 3 large cloves garlic, minced** (about 1 tablespoon)
- Seasoning** (see the ideas at far right)
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour**
- 3 cups stewing liquid** (see the ideas at far right)
- 4 cups prepared vegetables, about 1½ pounds** (see the ideas at far right)
- 3 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley or other fresh herb**

### 1 prepare the beef

Adjust a rack to the lower middle of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

Pat the beef dry with paper towels, trim away any thick pieces of fat, and cut into 1-inch cubes. Season generously with salt and pepper.

### 2 sear the beef

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil over medium-high heat in a heavy-based Dutch oven that's 9 to 11 inches in diameter. As soon as wisps of smoke rise from the pan, add a quarter of the beef cubes, taking care not to crowd the pan. Sear the beef until two sides form an impressive dark-brown crust, 8 to 10 minutes total. Transfer the beef to a bowl and continue to sear the remaining beef in batches, adding more oil to the pan if needed. It's fine if the pan bottom darkens, but if it smells like it's burning, lower the heat just a little. Set all the seared beef aside in the bowl. (For more about searing meat, see p. 70.)

### 3 cook the aromatics

Reduce the heat to medium and add the onions and garlic to the empty pot. If the pan looks dry, add 1 tablespoon oil. Cook, stirring frequently, until softened, about 5 minutes.

### 4 add the seasoning

Add the seasoning (for ideas, see the list at far right) and continue to cook, stirring, until fragrant, 30 seconds to 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper.

### 5 add the flour & liquid

Stir in the flour and then the stewing liquid (for ideas, see the list at far right). Return the beef and any accumulated juices to the pot.

### 6 cover tightly & cook

Lay a large sheet of heavy-duty foil over the pot and, using a potholder or a thick towel, press it down in the center so that it almost touches the stew and is pressed against the sides of the pot (see the photo at left). Crimp the foil around the rim for a tight seal. Cover snugly with the lid. Turn the burner to medium high until you hear juices bubble. Put the pot in the oven and cook for 1 hour and 15 minutes.



## 7 cook the vegetables

Meanwhile, cook the vegetables. Choose a combination of two or three vegetables; for ideas, see the list at right. I recommend either steaming or sautéing the vegetables—not both—unless you don't mind cleaning an extra pan.

## 8 add the vegetables

Remove the pot from the oven, carefully remove the foil, and stir in the cooked vegetables. Remembering that the pot and lid are hot, cover again with the foil and the lid. Let stand so that the meat rests and the vegetables marry with the stew, about 15 minutes.

## 9 adjust & serve

When ready to serve, the stew juices might need thinning to achieve a thin gravy consistency. If so, stir in water— $\frac{1}{4}$  cup at a time—as needed. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Gently reheat, if necessary, and serve garnished with the parsley or other fresh herb.

## Seasonings

Choose one of the following seasoning combinations to create the flavor profile of your stew. If you use bay leaves, be sure to remove them before serving.

### CLASSIC

2 bay leaves  
2 teaspoons dried thyme leaves

### HUNGARIAN

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup sweet Hungarian paprika  
1  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons caraway seeds, crushed to a powder with a mortar and pestle, a spice grinder, or a rolling pin

### SOUTHWESTERN

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup chili powder  
2 teaspoons ground cumin  
1 teaspoon dried oregano

### ITALIAN

2 bay leaves  
1  $\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons minced fresh rosemary leaves

### CURRY

2 tablespoons sweet curry powder  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground ginger  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon ground cloves

## Stewing liquids

The stew needs 3 cups liquid. These are some of my favorite combinations. When using wine, lean toward a full-bodied red or a dry white.

### RED WINE

1 cup red wine  
2 cups water

### WHITE WINE

1 cup white wine  
2 cups water

### ORANGE JUICE & WINE

1 cup fresh orange juice  
1 cup white wine  
1 cup water

### TOMATOES & WINE

14  $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce can diced tomatoes (yields about 1 cup juice and  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup diced tomatoes)  
1 cup red or white wine  
1 cup water

### MUSHROOM BROTH & WINE

1 cup dried mushroom broth\*  
1 cup red or white wine  
1 cup water

\*To make the mushroom broth, rehydrate  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce dried mushrooms in 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups boiling water for 5 minutes. Strain through a cloth, reserving the mushrooms (which you can add to the stew along with the broth).

## Vegetables

Choose a combination of two or three vegetables, totaling 4 cups after any trimming or cutting. Steam or sauté the vegetables until just tender.

**CARROTS**, peeled and cut into bite-size pieces

**PARSNIPS**, peeled and cut into bite-size pieces

**TURNIPS** (white or rutabaga), peeled and cut into bite-size pieces

**WINTER SQUASH**, peeled and cut into bite-size pieces

**CAULIFLOWER**, cut into bite-size florets

**POTATOES** (Yukon Gold, red, or sweet), peeled and cut into bite-size pieces

**GREEN BEANS**, trimmed and snapped in half

**PEARL ONIONS**, fresh or frozen

**MUSHROOMS**, trimmed and quartered

**BELL PEPPERS**, stemmed, cored, and cut into 1-inch-wide slices

**SUMMER SQUASH** (zucchini and yellow squash) cut into bite-size chunks

**EGGPLANT**, trimmed and cut into bite-size chunks

These vegetables need no cooking before being added to the stew:

**FROZEN GREEN PEAS**, thawed

**FROZEN LIMA BEANS**, thawed

**CANNED BEANS OR CHICKPEAS**, rinsed and drained

**OLIVES**, pitted (use no more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup)



*Pam Anderson is the author of three books—The Perfect Recipe, How to Cook without a Book, and CookSmart. ♦*

# Chicken in a Flash

Sliced chicken breast plus a quick pan sauce equals dinner on the table in short order

BY JENNIFER ARMENTROUT

**A** confession: After spending all day testing recipes in the *Fine Cooking* test kitchen, I sometimes struggle to find the motivation to cook dinner at home. But I can only get away with dining on a bowl of popcorn every so often, so most nights I'm still looking for inspiration for a delicious but unfussy meal. Like many of you, I want something to satisfy my taste buds, but I don't want to spend a lot of time creating it. That's how I came up with this collection of quick-cooking chicken breast recipes, all based on the same prep and cooking techniques.

**Slices mean quick cooking.** By slicing the boneless chicken breasts on an angle (see the photos at far right) and searing the slices over medium-high heat, I'm able to cook the chicken in about six minutes and still get lightly golden brown and juicy results.

**A pan sauce adds pizzazz.** Chicken breasts are fairly mild in flavor, so I like to jazz them up with full-flavored sauces made in the same pan in which I cooked the chicken. Chicken takes well to all sorts of flavors, so depending on the mood I'm in, I can have an Italian-inspired Marsala chicken or an Indian-style coconut-curry chicken. A satisfying dinner is ready within 20 to 30 minutes, and later on, there are hardly any dishes to wash.



## Chicken with Spiced Tomato, Caper & Olive Sauce

*Serves two to three.*

The inspiration for this recipe was Cuban picadillo, a meat dish usually seasoned with tomatoes, onions, garlic, and fragrant spices like cinnamon and cloves. Serve on a bed of white or brown rice.

**1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 3)**

**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**1½ teaspoons ground cumin**

**½ teaspoon dried oregano**

**¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon**

**Tiny pinch each of ground cloves, ground nutmeg, and cayenne**

**1 large clove garlic, minced**

**3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**

**½ small onion, finely diced (about ⅓ cup)**

**1 tablespoon tomato paste**

**⅓ cup dry red wine**

**14½-ounce can diced tomatoes, with their juices**

**1 tablespoon light or dark brown sugar**





**16 pimento-stuffed green olives, sliced crosswise into thirds**  
**1 tablespoon drained capers, rinsed**  
**1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil**

Trim the chicken, removing the tenders, and slice on an angle into  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick pieces (see the photo at top right); season generously with salt and pepper. In a small bowl, combine the cumin, oregano, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and cayenne. Put the garlic on top of the spices and set aside.

In a 10-inch straight-sided sauté pan, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil over medium-high heat until the oil is hot enough to shimmer. Add half of the chicken and cook, flipping once, until lightly browned and just barely cooked through, 1 to 2 minutes per side. Transfer the chicken to a plate; repeat with the remaining chicken. Cover with foil to keep warm.

Return the pan to medium heat. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon oil and then the

onion. Sauté, stirring almost constantly with a wooden spoon, until the onion is softened and browned, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the spices and garlic, and cook, stirring constantly, for about 20 seconds. Add the tomato paste and cook, smearing the paste around the pan with the back of the spoon, for about 30 seconds. Pour in the wine and scrape the pan with the spoon to loosen any browned bits. Let the wine simmer until the mixture looks like a coarse, wet paste, 1 to 2 minutes.

Stir in the tomatoes with their juices, the brown sugar, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt. Adjust the heat as needed to bring the mixture to a simmer. Cover and simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in the olives and capers. Simmer gently uncovered for another 5 minutes. Taste the sauce; add salt and pepper as needed. Add the chicken and any accumulated juices to the sauce and turn to coat with the sauce. Serve immediately, sprinkled with the basil.

## For juicy chicken, cook slices quickly



**slice** Holding your knife at a 45-degree angle, cut each breast crosswise into  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick slices.



**sear** White edges signal that it's time to flip the chicken. Slide a spatula under each piece to release any areas that are sticking.

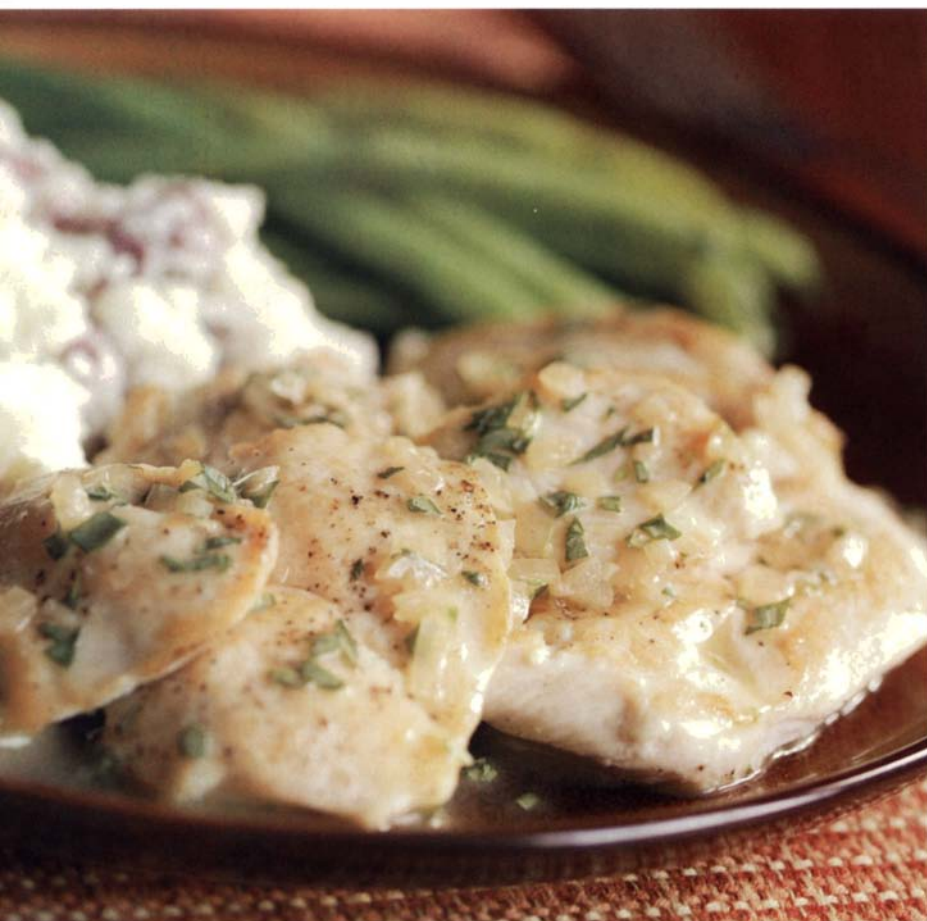
### reader review

A *Fine Cooking* reader gave a few of these recipes a real-world test.

*"These dishes were unfussy but delicious. Once I got the hang of the basic process—slicing, searing, and saucing—I could see that the possibilities for flavor combinations were endless."*

—Lucia Tranel,  
St. Louis, Missouri





## Chicken with Tarragon & Vermouth

*Serves two to three.*

Chicken and tarragon are a classic French combination. Serve with potatoes or rice pilaf and a green vegetable, such as steamed haricots verts or asparagus.

**1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 3)**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil; more as needed**  
**2 tablespoons minced shallot**  
**½ cup dry vermouth or dry white wine**  
**3 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into 6 to 8 pieces**  
**2 teaspoons chopped fresh tarragon**

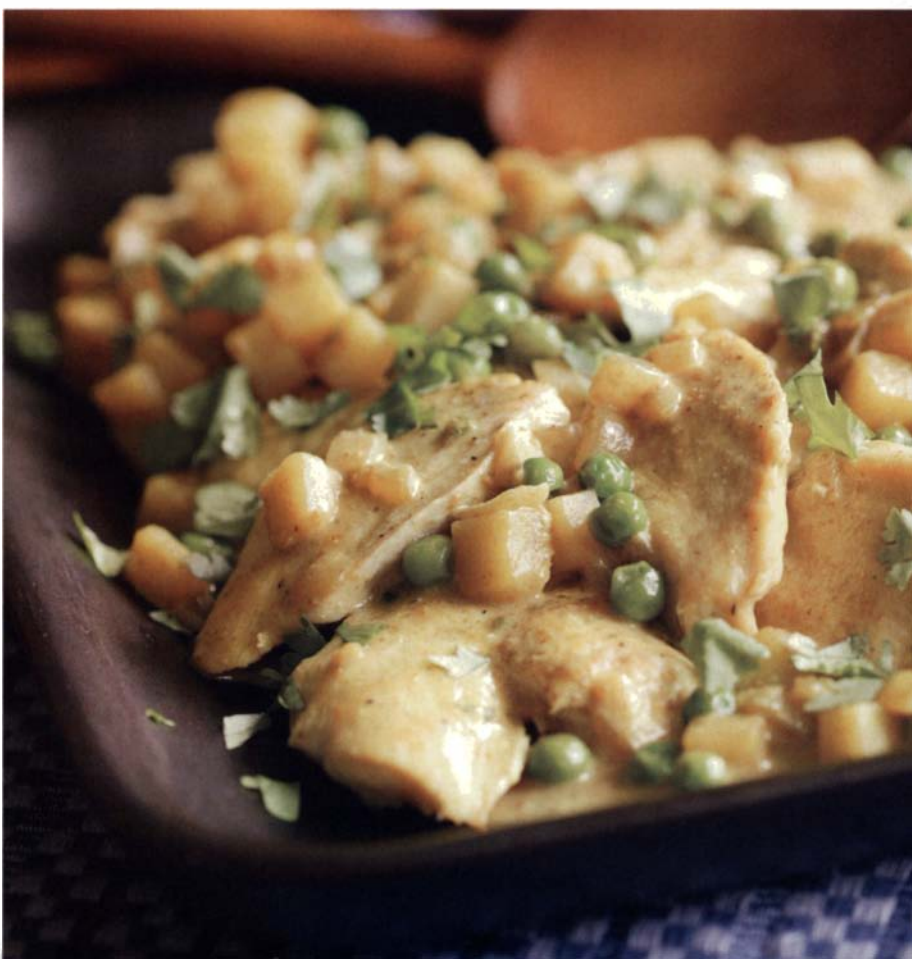
Trim the chicken, removing the tenders, and slice on an angle into ¾-inch-thick pieces (see the photo on p. 41); season generously with salt and pepper. In a 10-inch straight-sided sauté pan, heat the oil over medium-high heat until it shimmers. Add half of the chicken and cook, flipping once, until lightly browned and just barely cooked through, 1 to 2 minutes per side. Transfer to a plate; repeat with the remaining chicken. Cover with foil to keep warm.

Return the pan to medium heat and, if it looks dry, add 1 tablespoon oil. Add the shallot and sauté, stirring with a wooden spoon, until softened, about 1 minute. Pour in the vermouth and scrape the pan with the spoon to loosen any browned bits. Let the vermouth simmer until reduced slightly, about 2 minutes. Reduce the heat to low and add the cold butter 2 or 3 pieces at a time, stirring after each addition until completely melted. Stir in the tarragon, taste the sauce, and add salt and pepper as needed. Add the chicken and any accumulated juices to the sauce and turn to coat with the sauce. Serve immediately.

## wine suggestions

- ❖ For the **Chicken with Spiced Tomato, Caper & Olive Sauce**, pour a wine with both fruity and herbal qualities and light tannins. Try a young Grenache-based blend from the Côtes du Rhône.
- ❖ Think Italian with the **Chicken with Marsala, Mushrooms & Gorgonzola**. Go for a young, fruity, high-acid red wine, such as a Dolcetto, a Barbera, or a Sangiovese that's not Chianti.
- ❖ A zingy-crisp white wine with herbal notes will match the tarragon in the **Chicken with Tarragon & Vermouth**. A Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand would be delicious.
- ❖ Choose a white wine for the **Chicken with Potatoes, Peas & Coconut-Curry Sauce**. Look for a young, fairly fruity, unoaked wine that has just a touch of sweetness, such as Viognier, Chenin Blanc, or Riesling.

—Tim Gaiser, contributing editor







## Chicken with Marsala, Mushrooms & Gorgonzola

*Serves two to three.*

I like to serve my version of Chicken Marsala over mini penne, but any pasta shape will do.

- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 3)**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 6 ounces cremini or white mushrooms, sliced ½ inch thick (about 2¼ cups)**
- 2 large cloves garlic, minced**
- ½ cup dry Marsala**
- ⅓ cup heavy cream**
- 1½ ounces crumbled Gorgonzola (⅓ cup)**
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

Trim the chicken, removing the tenders, and slice on an angle into ¾-inch-thick pieces (see the photo on p. 41); season generously with salt and pepper. In a 10-inch straight-sided sauté pan, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil over medium-high heat until it shimmers. Add half of the chicken and cook, flipping once, until lightly

browned and just barely cooked through, 1 to 2 minutes per side. Transfer the chicken to a plate; repeat with the remaining chicken. Cover with foil to keep warm.

Return the pan to medium-high heat and add the remaining 1 tablespoon oil. Add the mushrooms, season lightly with salt, and sauté, stirring with a wooden spoon, until softened and well browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium, add the garlic, and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, 20 to 30 seconds. Pour in the Marsala and scrape the pan with the spoon to loosen any browned bits; simmer until the Marsala is reduced slightly, about 2 minutes. Stir in the cream and simmer until thickened slightly, 2 to 3 minutes. Add two-thirds of the Gorgonzola and stir until melted, 1 to 2 minutes. Taste the sauce; add salt and pepper as needed. Add the chicken along with any accumulated juices and turn to coat with the sauce. Serve immediately, sprinkled with the remaining cheese and the parsley.



## Chicken with Potatoes, Peas & Coconut-Curry Sauce

*Serves two to three.*

Potatoes and peas make this curry a meal-in-one, but it's also delicious with basmati rice.

- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 3)**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil; more as needed**
- ½ medium onion, finely diced (to yield about ½ cup)**
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger**
- 2 teaspoons seeded, minced fresh jalapeño**
- 1 tablespoon sweet curry powder (not Madras or hot)**
- 1 cup homemade or low-salt chicken broth**
- 1 medium (6-ounce) red or yellow potato, peeled and cut into ¼-inch dice (to yield about 1 cup)**
- 5½-ounce can coconut milk, well shaken**
- ½ cup frozen peas**
- 2 tablespoons roughly chopped fresh cilantro**

Trim the chicken, removing the tenders, and slice on an angle into ¾-inch-thick pieces (see the photo on p. 41); season generously with salt and pepper. In a 10-inch straight-sided sauté pan, heat the oil over medium-high heat

until it's hot enough to shimmer. Add half of the chicken and cook, flipping once, until lightly browned and just barely cooked through, 1 to 2 minutes per side. Transfer the chicken to a plate; repeat with the remaining chicken. Cover with foil to keep warm.

Return the pan to medium heat and, if it looks dry, add another 1 tablespoon oil. Add the onion, ginger, and jalapeño and sauté, stirring almost constantly with a wooden spoon, until the vegetables soften, about 2 minutes. Add the curry powder and sauté for 30 seconds. Pour in the chicken broth and scrape the pan with the spoon to loosen any browned bits. Add the potato and ½ teaspoon salt. Bring to a simmer and cook, partially covered, until the potato is barely tender, 7 to 8 minutes. Add the coconut milk and peas; simmer uncovered until the peas are thawed, the potato is fully tender, and the sauce is somewhat thickened, 4 to 5 minutes. Taste the sauce; add salt and pepper as needed. Add the chicken along with any accumulated juices to the sauce and turn to coat with the sauce. Serve immediately, sprinkled with the cilantro.

*Jennifer Armentrout  
is Fine Cooking's test  
kitchen manager. ♦*

# Instead of rice or potatoes, try Polenta

BY ALAN TARDI

**D**on't let the name fool you—polenta may sound like something complicated to make, but it's really just good, simple, down-home food. Exceptionally versatile, nourishing, and extremely tasty, it makes a quick and unexpected side dish and marries well with a variety of main courses, especially saucy ones like beef stew or chicken fricassée. It's the perfect antidote for a cold winter day. Sometimes I get a craving for polenta and then figure out what I'm going to serve with it.

**Polenta is user-friendly.** Despite popular belief, you don't have to watch over polenta the whole time

it cooks. And the formula is easy. While no two types of cornmeal are exactly the same, on average, you'll need about 4 cups liquid to 1 cup regular cornmeal. You can adjust the liquid as you go: If the polenta has thickened but is still a bit gritty, add a little more water.

Once you understand the technique, then you can start to have fun with variations. Try mixing in ingredients like chopped fresh herbs and various cheeses at the end of cooking (see the ideas at far right); or pour the polenta into a pan, let it set, cut it into shapes, and use it as a base for snazzy appetizers and hors d'oeuvres.

## Basic Soft Polenta

*Serves four to six as a side dish.*

We tested this recipe with Quaker brand cornmeal; coarser cornmeal will need a slightly longer cooking time.

**2 teaspoons kosher salt;  
more to taste**  
**1 cup yellow cornmeal**  
**2 tablespoons unsalted butter**

In a heavy stainless-steel 3-quart saucepan, bring 4 cups water to a boil. Add the salt and stir with a wooden spoon to dissolve. Continue with the basic method below.



## Basic soft polenta method



When the salted water is boiling, gradually add the cornmeal in a thin, steady stream, whisking constantly. This is important; if you pour in the cornmeal too quickly, lumps may form. When all the cornmeal has been added, lower the heat to maintain a slow simmer.



Cook, whisking occasionally to prevent sticking, and scraping the inside of the pot with a rubber spatula to incorporate any cornmeal that does stick. The polenta will bubble and spurt a bit.



If the polenta gets too thick and starts to stick to the bottom of the pot, add a little warm water. The polenta is done when it's very thick and creamy, with a texture that's slightly rough but not gritty, 20 to 25 minutes, depending on

the cornmeal. Taste a bit to check the texture. If it's still gritty, add a little more water and continue cooking until the texture has softened. Stir in the butter, if using, and add more salt to taste. Serve immediately.





*Try topping polenta with a saucy vegetable ragoût.*

## Cornmeal is the ingredient; polenta is the dish

Although polenta is the name of the prepared dish, it's made from cornmeal. There are two basic kinds of cornmeal, yellow and white, but more important than color is how it's made. Cornmeal can range from a fine flour manufactured in a modern roller mill to a rough meal ground in a local gristmill. I prefer a coarse, artisanal, stone-ground cornmeal even though it takes a bit longer to cook: It has a more interesting, toothy texture. But if you can't find that, it's no reason not to make polenta. Just be sure your cornmeal contains only ground corn; avoid brands with additives or preservatives. Don't use instant polenta: Although it cooks in about 5 minutes, it gives a more muted color and flavor and pastier consistency than the full, nutty, sweet flavor and creamy texture of regular cornmeal.

## Quick flavor variations to try

### MASCARPONE & PARMIGIANO POLENTA

*Serves four to six as a side dish.*

- 2 teaspoons kosher salt; more to taste**
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal**
- ½ cup mascarpone (or 3 ounces cream cheese plus 1 tablespoon heavy cream)**
- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano**

In a heavy stainless-steel 3-quart saucepan, bring 4 cups water to a boil. Add the salt and stir with a wooden spoon to dissolve. Follow the basic soft polenta method at left, omitting the butter at the end. Gently whisk in the mascarpone (or, if you're using cream cheese, whisk it with the cream in a bowl before adding it

to the polenta). Turn off the heat and stir in ½ cup of the Parmigiano. Thin the polenta with up to ½ cup water, if you like; add salt to taste. Scoop the polenta into a serving bowl, sprinkle with the remaining Parmigiano, and serve.

### POLENTA ROSA (TOMATO POLENTA)

*Serves four to six as a side dish.*

This variation uses the juices from the tomatoes as part of the cooking liquid.

- 1 cup canned diced tomatoes, with their juices**
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt; more to taste**
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal**
- ⅓ cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, finely diced**

- ¼ cup concentrated tomato paste (preferably Italian)**
- ½ teaspoon chopped fresh oregano or ¼ teaspoon dried (optional)**

Put the tomatoes in a fine sieve set over a bowl and shake it to drain as much liquid as possible. Put the tomato liquid in a measuring cup; add water to get 4 cups total liquid. Pour the liquid into a heavy stainless-steel 3-quart saucepan, add the salt, and proceed with basic soft polenta method at left, omitting the butter.

When the polenta is thick and creamy, set it over low heat, whisk in the sun-dried tomatoes and add the tomato paste and the canned tomatoes. Add the oregano, if using, and salt to taste, and serve.

### Or try stirring in:

- ❖ A tablespoon or two of chopped fresh sage, thyme, oregano, tarragon, or chives.
- ❖ Grated cheeses such as Fontina, Cheddar, or Parmesan, or crumbled goat cheese.

### Or serve topped with:

- ❖ A saucy ragoût or stir-fry of vegetables or meat.
- ❖ Sautéed greens with garlic and pancetta
- ❖ A mix of mushrooms, sautéed, seasoned with fresh herbs, and deglazed with cream.

*Alan Tardi was the chef-owner of Follonico in New York City.* ♦



# Braising Winter





# Vegetables

Gentle browning for sweet flavor,  
oven simmering for velvety tenderness

BY JEAN-PIERRE MOULLÉ

One of the things I like best about braising is that it reminds me of home, or, more to the point, of my mother's cooking. When I smell the aroma of a rich vegetable braise simmering in the oven—something like my mother would make after a visit to our local farmers' market—I'm back in my childhood, growing up in the French countryside. The beauty of a braise (my mother discovered this early on) is that it cooks itself while you do something else. Even better, when it's done, it delivers unforgettably deep, rich flavor and meltingly tender texture.

You're probably familiar with the technique of braising meat (think pot roast), but what you might not know is that braising—browning first, adding a cooking liquid, and then covering the pot and simmering—is also a great way to cook vegetables. As you'd guess, root vegetables take especially well to braising because they're firm enough to hold their shape and texture without getting mushy. By browning the vegetables first, you get some of that sweet caramelized flavor that you do from sautéing. But then, by simmering the vegetables in a little bit of flavorful liquid, you get a deeper, richer flavor and a velvety texture.

One of my favorite pots for braising is an enameled cast-iron Dutch oven (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 78). This type of pot is heavy

enough to brown the vegetables nicely and provide even, constant heat, and its heavy lid provides a good seal when the vegetables go in the oven. For these recipes, which serve four, use a pot no larger than 9 inches in diameter so that the vegetables are snugly packed. You'll get the most concentrated flavor that way.

**The first step to a flavorful braise is browning aromatics like onions or shallots.** You can use a variety of fats to do this. The recipes here call for butter, olive oil, pancetta, or a combination, but I also love using duck fat. Your next layer of flavor comes from adding the vegetables and browning them.

**Just before the pot goes in the oven, add another layer of flavor—the braising liquid.** The liquid can vary, too. I most often use broth, tomato juice, water, wine, or a combination. Add just enough to the pot to create steam during the covered portion of cooking. (Adding more would mean you'd have too much liquid at the end of cooking, and you'd have to boil it down.) Seasonings like a bouquet garni (a bundle of bay leaf, thyme, and parsley stems), citrus zest, and other herbs add flavor and aroma to the braising liquid. During braising, the vegetables give up their own liquid, which in turn infuses the braising liquid with more flavor. This is exactly what you're looking for, and it's what braising delivers so well: a delicious blend of layered flavors.

## Braised Carrots & Shallots

*Serves four as a side dish.*

The combination of sweet carrots, shallots, and tangy tomato is an intriguing one. Orange zest adds a lovely aroma.

**6 medium carrots (about 1½ pounds), peeled**  
**2 tablespoons olive oil**  
**1½ tablespoons unsalted butter**  
**6 to 8 shallots (about 8 ounces total), thinly sliced (to yield 1½ cups thin shallot rings)**  
**1 teaspoon kosher salt**  
**3 whole canned tomatoes, cut into ½-inch pieces; plus ½ cup of the tomato juices**  
**3 large cloves garlic, sliced**  
**3 long strips orange zest (from 1 small orange)**  
**1 bouquet garni (1 sprig fresh thyme, 1 bay leaf, and 4 parsley stems, tied with twine)**  
**Pinch cayenne**  
**3 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

Heat the oven to 350°F. Halve the carrots lengthwise and cut them into 2-inch long pieces. Heat the butter and olive oil in a medium (9-inch) Dutch oven over medium heat. When the oil is hot and the butter has melted, add the sliced shallots and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and slightly browned, about 5 minutes. Remove the shallots from the pot with a slotted spoon and set them aside. Add the carrots and salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the carrots are lightly browned, about 12 minutes. Add the tomatoes and their juices, along with the garlic, orange zest, bouquet garni, and cayenne. Stir in the shallots and ¼ cup water. Cover the pot, put it in the oven, and let cook until very tender, 20 to 25 minutes. Discard the orange zest and bouquet garni. Arrange the vegetables on a platter, sprinkle with the parsley, and serve.





## Braised Winter Vegetables

*Serves four as a side dish.*

- 2 medium carrots, peeled**
- 1 medium parsnip, peeled**
- 2 small turnips (8 ounces total), peeled**
- 2 small onions**
- 1 medium bulb fennel, trimmed**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil**
- 1 bouquet garni (1 sprig fresh thyme, 1 bay leaf, and 4 parsley stems, tied with twine)**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ cup water (or ¼ cup chicken broth and ¼ cup water)**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh herbs (I like a mix of parsley, thyme, and chives)**

Heat the oven to 350°F. Cut the carrots and parsnip on the diagonal into 1-inch chunks. Cut the turnips and onions into wedges about 1 inch thick at their widest point. Split the fennel bulb lengthwise, notch out the core, and then cut the fennel crosswise into 1-inch slices. Heat the olive oil in a medium (9-inch) Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Add the other vegetables, the bouquet garni, ½ teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste. Raise the heat to medium high and cook until the vegetables are lightly browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Add the water or broth and bring to a boil. Cover the pot, put it in the oven, and bake until the vegetables are fully cooked but still hold their shape, 20 to 25 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the vegetables to a serving bowl. Bring the pan juices to a boil over medium heat. (If there's a lot of liquid left, boil until reduced to about ¼ cup.) Discard the bouquet garni. Whisk in the butter and herbs. Spoon the sauce over the vegetables and serve.

### 3 steps for great flavor in braised vegetables



**Brown aromatics, like onions, for deeper flavor.**



**Add the rest of the vegetables and brown them gently.**



**Add the braising liquid. You'll only need a little; there's no need to submerge the vegetables.**





## Potatoes Boulangère

*Serves six as a side dish.*

This dish is like a potato gratin but without the cheese and cream; the pancetta (Italian cured bacon) adds rich flavor. It would make a great side dish for roast chicken or beef.

**1 tablespoon olive oil**  
**3½ ounces (½ cup) diced pancetta**  
**3 small onions, thinly sliced (2 cups)**  
**3 medium sprigs fresh thyme**  
**1 bay leaf**  
**Scant 1 teaspoon kosher salt**  
**¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**  
**2 pounds Yukon Gold or Yellow Finn potatoes, peeled and sliced into ¼-inch-thick half moons**  
**1 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**

Heat the oven to 375°F. Heat the olive oil in a medium (9-inch) Dutch oven over medium heat. When the oil is hot, add the pancetta. Sauté until it just begins to crisp and turn brown, about 4 minutes. Add the onions, thyme, bay leaf, salt, and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally and more frequently toward the end, until the onions are deep golden, about 14 minutes. Meanwhile in a small saucepan, bring the chicken broth to a boil and then remove from the heat. Add the potatoes to the onions and cook, stirring for a minute or two. Pour the hot broth over the potatoes and onions and bring the pot to a boil, stirring with a wooden spoon to scrape up the browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Cover the pot, put it in the oven, and bake for about 15 minutes. Uncover the pot, gently and evenly push the potatoes down with a spatula, and continue to bake uncovered until the potatoes are completely tender and have started to brown, about another 25 minutes. Discard the bay leaf and thyme before serving.

## tip:

Although a Dutch oven (a deep, straight-sided flameproof casserole with a tight-fitting lid) is traditional for these recipes, a straight-sided sauté pan works, too.

- ❖ If you use a sauté pan, it should be about 3 inches deep and no more than 9 inches in diameter. That way, the vegetables will be snugly packed. Be sure it has a lid.
- ❖ Be extra careful when you take a sauté pan out of the oven: The handle will be extremely hot, so tie a kitchen towel around it to prevent burning yourself or others who might try to touch the pan, not realizing that it's been in a hot oven.

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*Jean-Pierre Moullé was the executive chef at Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, California, for more than twenty years. ♦*



# Carrot Cake Perfected



Great texture, a subtle balance of spices, and satiny icing add

BY GREG CASE

**T**hroughout my career as a pastry chef, I've made carrot cake in just about every kind of setting, from four-star restaurants to neighborhood pubs. I've made carrot cupcakes for kids' birthday parties and even carrot wedding cakes. People never seem to tire of it. I think it's because carrot cake—moist, sweet, and substantial—is nothing if not comforting.

I've been fine-tuning my recipe for 22 years, and there are some key details that set it apart. The cake starts with a creamy emulsion. You're essentially making a sweet mayonnaise with the sugars, eggs, and oils, which you then fold into the dry ingredients. That creamy emulsion ensures an even distribution of the ingredients, which in turn gives you an incredibly moist cake. And instead of raisins, which tend to sink to the bottom of the cake pan, I use dried currants, which are smaller and more apt to disperse evenly. A balanced blend of spices and an especially satiny icing make this my all-time best version of carrot cake.



Many recipes call for grated carrots, but here they're ground very finely in a food processor to the consistency of couscous, which makes for more even distribution and gives the cake its fine texture.





up to a refined version of a familiar classic



A balanced blend of spices lends warmth and subtle homey flavor, with no one spice dominating. Other carrot cakes can be top-heavy with cinnamon, nutmeg, or cloves. Walnut oil adds another layer of rich, nutty flavor.

Velvety frosting adds tang and richness. Butter and cream cheese that are completely softened (but not so soft that they turn greasy) and just enough sugar ensure that the frosting has especially satiny texture.

## Ultimate Carrot Cake

*Serves twelve to fifteen.*

Walnut oil gives this cake's flavor special depth, and toasted walnut oil gives the very best result. For sources, see p. 78.

### FOR THE CAKE:

**Softened butter and flour for the pan**

**½ cup dried currants**

**1 pound carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces**

**10 ounces (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour**

**2 teaspoons baking soda**

**1 teaspoon table salt**

**1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**

**¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg**

**¼ teaspoon ground allspice**

**¼ teaspoon ground mace**

**¼ teaspoon ground cloves**

**3 ounces (¾ cup) walnuts or pecans, coarsely chopped**

**4 large eggs, at room temperature**

**1½ cups granulated sugar**

**½ cup packed dark brown sugar**

**1 cup vegetable oil**

**¼ cup walnut oil (I prefer toasted)**

### FOR THE FROSTING:

**8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces and completely softened at room temperature**

**1 pound cream cheese, cut into pieces and completely softened at room temperature**

**4¼ ounces (1 cup) confectioners' sugar, sifted**

**1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract**

**1 ounce (½ cup) chopped walnuts or pecans for garnish (optional)**

**Make the cake:** Position a rack in the bottom third of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour a 9x13-inch heavy-duty metal cake pan. Soak the currants in ½ cup hot tap water for 15 minutes. Drain and set aside.

In a food processor (use the steel blade), chop the carrots very finely to about the consistency of couscous. Transfer to a small bowl and rinse the food processor bowl (you'll need it again).

In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking soda, salt, and spices. Whisk to blend thoroughly. Transfer ¼ cup of this mixture to a small bowl and add the drained currants and the 3 ounces nuts. Toss to combine.

In the food processor (again use the steel blade), mix the eggs and sugars until blended. With the machine running, slowly add the oils in a steady stream until combined. Scrape this mixture into the flour mixture. Stir with a wooden spoon or rubber spatula to combine. Add the carrots and the raisin-nut mixture; stir to combine.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean, about 50 minutes. Let cool on a rack to room temperature before inverting the pan to remove the cake. Let cool completely before frosting.

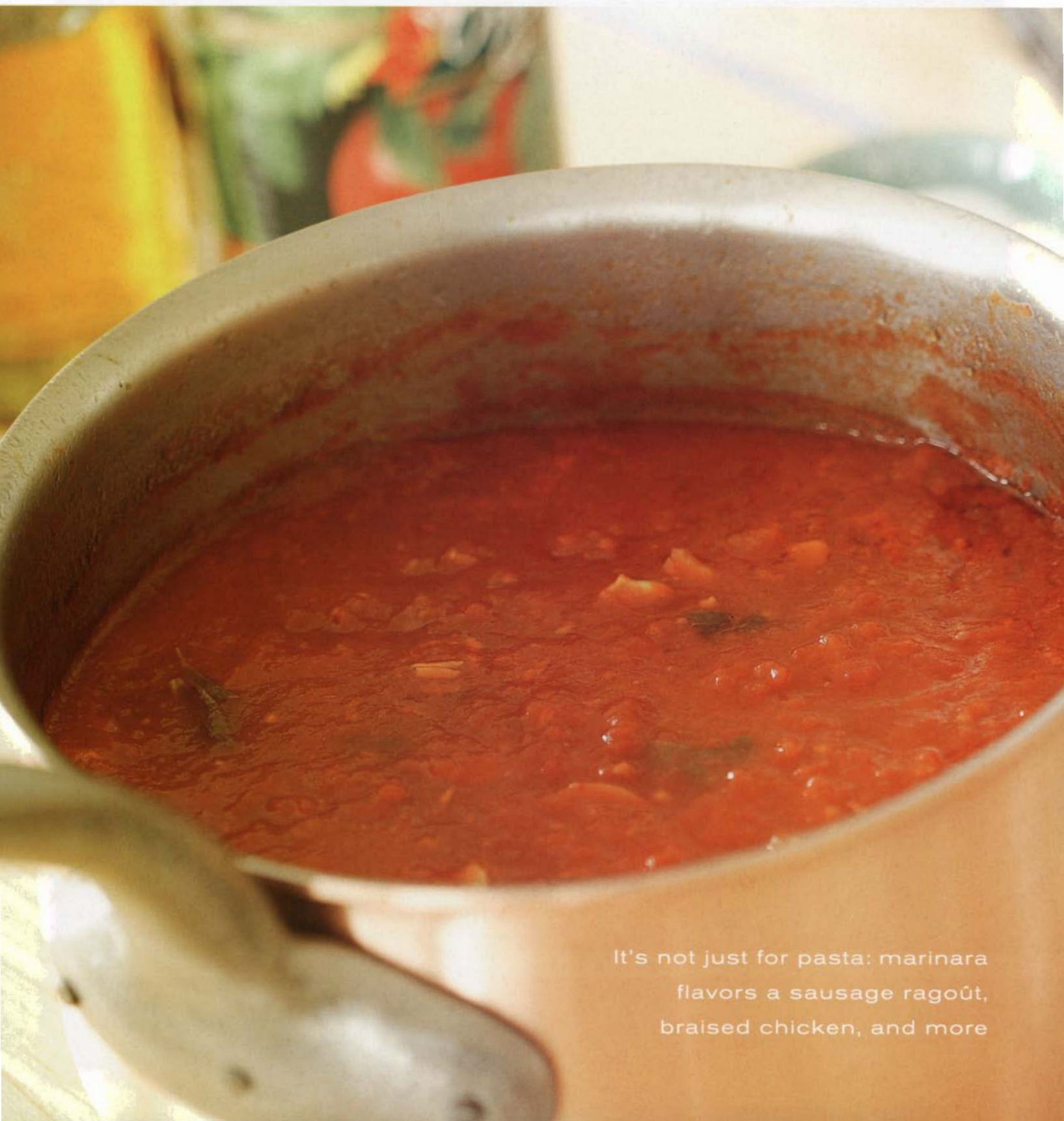
**Make the frosting:** Fit a stand mixer with the paddle attachment (a hand mixer works, too). Beat the butter on medium speed until it's quite light, fluffy, and resembles whipped cream, about 3 minutes. Add the cream cheese one piece at a time, beating well after each addition. When all the cream cheese is incorporated, reduce the speed to medium low and gradually add the sugar and vanilla, stopping the mixer each time you add the sugar. Mix just enough to remove any lumps; scrape the bowl as needed. If the frosting seems a bit loose, refrigerate it for a few minutes until it seems spreadable.

**Frost the cake:** Scrape about two-thirds of the frosting onto the center of the cake. With a narrow metal offset spatula, push the frosting from the center out to and just over the cake's edges. Spread with as few strokes as possible to prevent crumbs from catching in the frosting. Cover the top of the cake first then use the remaining frosting along with what's creeping over the edges of the cake to cover the sides. Once the cake is covered, drag the front tip of the spatula back and forth from end to end to create a textured surface on the top of the cake. If you like, sprinkle the nuts on top of the cake and press them into the sides.

*Greg Case is the chef-owner of G. Case Baking, a retail and wholesale bakery, in Somerville, Massachusetts. ♦*

cooking ahead

# Make marinara sauce now...



It's not just for pasta: marinara  
flavors a sausage ragoût,  
braised chicken, and more





# use it in many meals to come

With this quick tomato sauce in the freezer, you've got the makings for great meals on short notice

BY NANCY VERDE BARR

## Use marinara in braises and stews

(see the recipes that follow) in place of canned tomatoes when you want to save time. Because the sauce is already seasoned and concentrated, the total cooking time is shorter.

## Make your choice of pasta sauces in minutes

when you have a supply of marinara sauce in your freezer. See the sidebar on p. 57 for how to make puttanesca, Bolognese, and other sauces from a basic marinara.

Like clockwork, my Italian grandmother made a large pot of tomato sauce twice a week, every week. The sauce made on Sunday morning was served over pasta for our ritual Sunday lunch. Leftover sauce—she always made extra—went into the fridge and became an ingredient in other meals over the next few days. By Wednesday, the sauce was used up and she made a second pot.

Although she lived in a different era, my grandmother's efficient strategy of cooking makes a lot of sense today. Like her, I'm never without a supply of tomato sauce. It takes less than an hour to whip up a new batch, so it's easy to make more when I run low. The sauce goes into my soups and stews, it becomes a braising liquid for meats and, with a few added ingredients, it can turn into any of several richly flavored pasta sauces. I use my tomato sauce in place of canned tomatoes, and since it's already seasoned and reduced, it saves time during cooking. In short, my stash of frozen tomato sauce lets me put delicious homemade meals on the dinner table faster since I don't have to start from scratch every time.

In Italian cooking, there are two basic types of tomato sauce: a long-cooking meat sauce known as a ragù and a meatless sauce, known in my family as a marinara. I prefer the marinara for cooking ahead and using in other dishes, as it's more versatile and a lot simpler to make.

My marinara starts with a good-quality extra-virgin olive oil. I use just enough to cover the bottom of a large saucepan or Dutch oven; the sauce tends to splatter as it simmers, so err on the deeper side when choosing a cooking vessel. I add either garlic or onion, cook until it's softened, and then add canned plum tomatoes, red chile flakes, and fresh basil (see p. 54 for more on these ingredients). The sauce cooks for 20 to 30 minutes, enough to thicken slightly and develop a more concentrated flavor. That's all there is to it. I portion the sauce into containers, let it cool, and freeze it. When I'm ready to use the sauce in other dishes, I reheat it with a little olive oil or butter, depending on which flavor will best complement the dish. I might also add more fresh basil or other herbs or seasonings as the sauce reheats, but you can also use it just as it is.



## Tips for flavorful marinara

**Tomatoes are the star,** and they must be delicious. Good-quality canned plum tomatoes work wonderfully. My first choice is San Marzano tomatoes, which are sold in specialty food stores and online (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 78). Be sure the label says "San Marzano" and not "San Marzano type," and that they're imported from Italy. I'm also fond of Muir Glen organic brand.

**I use onions or garlic,** but not both. Few Neapolitans would include both in a marinara, but if you like the combination and there are no Neapolitan nonnas around to give you the evil eye, go ahead.

**Adding a hefty dash of red chile flakes** is a trick I learned from a Calabrian friend; it punches up the tomato flavor.

**Freeze the sauce in small portions** to make thawing fast and easy. Portion the sauce into 1-, 2-, or 3-cup servings and freeze in plastic containers or stand-up freezer bags. Once you thaw a portion of sauce, it will keep in the refrigerator for three to four days.

**If you can't find fresh basil,** make the sauce without and add the herb later, when you're ready to use the marinara. Dried basil isn't an acceptable substitute. Many canned Italian tomatoes include basil, which is fine, but you'll still need to add your own fresh leaves for noticeable basil flavor.

### Marinara Sauce

*Yields 9½ to 10 cups.*

**6½ pounds canned whole Italian plum tomatoes (three 35-ounce cans), with their juices**  
**3 tablespoons olive oil; more if needed**  
**5 large cloves garlic, thinly sliced, or 1 medium-large onion, finely chopped**  
**½ teaspoon red chile flakes**  
**1 tablespoon kosher salt**  
**¼ cup lightly packed fresh basil leaves, torn into small pieces**  
**Pinch granulated sugar, only if needed**

Empty a can of tomatoes with their juices into a food processor; pulse until coarsely chopped. Transfer to a bowl and repeat with the remaining two cans of tomatoes (or empty all the tomatoes into a large bowl and break them up with your hands).

Heat the oil in a large (at least 4-quart) saucepan or Dutch oven over medium-low heat. Add the garlic or onion. Cook, stirring often, until the garlic or onion is golden and softened, 5 to 10 minutes for garlic (don't let it burn); about 20 minutes for onion. Stir in the red chile flakes, let them heat for 15 seconds to

release their flavor, and then pour in the tomatoes with their juices. Bring to a boil over medium high, stirring frequently, and then reduce the heat to maintain a simmer. Add the salt and basil and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the sauce is full-flavored and has reduced to a thick, saucy consistency, 20 to 40 minutes (some brands of tomatoes take longer to cook down). Pools of orange may appear on the surface, which means the sauce is done. Taste and add the pinch of sugar only if the sauce lacks the natural sweetness of perfectly ripe, fresh tomatoes.





## Mediterranean Sausage Ragoût

*Serves four to six.*

I like to serve this with toasted pita bread seasoned with olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, and parsley. It's also delicious spooned over couscous.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil**
- 1 pound Italian sausages (sweet or hot)**
- 1 large onion, finely chopped**
- 4 large cloves garlic, finely chopped**
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh ginger**
- Kosher salt to taste**
- 1 tablespoon sweet paprika**
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander**
- ½ teaspoon red chile flakes**
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 5 medium carrots, peeled and sliced on the diagonal ¼ inch thick**
- 2 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**
- 1½ cups Marinara Sauce (recipe at left)**
- 3 cups (two 15½-ounce cans) cooked or canned chickpeas, rinsed**
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**

In a Dutch oven or large heavy pot, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Prick the sausages in several places so they

release their fat as they cook and put them in the pot. Cook until browned well on all sides, 8 to 10 minutes. If there's more than 2 tablespoons of fat in the pan, spoon out the extra. Stir the onion, garlic, and ginger in with the sausages. Season with salt and cook until the onion is softened, about 5 minutes. Add the paprika, coriander, red chile flakes, and cinnamon, and cook, stirring often, for 2 minutes. Add the carrots and continue to cook, stirring often, for 2 minutes. Pour in the chicken broth, increase the heat to medium high, bring to a boil, and then reduce the heat to a simmer. Cover and simmer until the carrots are almost tender (they should still have a bit of resistance when pierced with a fork), about 10 minutes. Transfer the sausages to a cutting board. Add the marinara sauce and the chickpeas to the pot, bring to a boil, and reduce to a simmer. Simmer uncovered until the carrots are fully tender and the chickpeas are hot, 3 to 5 minutes. Meanwhile, cut the sausages into bite-size pieces and return them to the pot. Stir in the lemon juice, season to taste with salt, and serve.

## Pan-Seared Steak Pizzaiola

*Serves four.*

- 2 rib-eye steaks (about 12 ounces each and 1 inch thick), trimmed of excess fat**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter; more as needed**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil; more as needed**
- 2 large onions, halved and thinly sliced**
- ½ cup dry red wine (I use whatever I'll be drinking with the meal, such as Chianti, Montepulciano, or Barbera)**
- 2 cups Marinara Sauce (recipe at far left)**
- 1 to 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

Cut each steak in half (to get four steaks) and pat them dry with paper towels. Season both sides with salt and pepper.

In a 12-inch heavy frying pan over medium heat, melt the butter with the oil. Add the onions, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, until they're well softened and translucent but not browned, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer the onions to a large plate with a slotted spoon. If there isn't much fat left in the pan, add another ½ tablespoon each of butter and oil.

Increase the heat to medium high. Put the steaks in the pan and sear until deeply browned on both sides and medium rare (cut into one to check), 2 to 3 minutes per side. Transfer to the plate with the onions.

Pour the wine into the pan. As it comes to a boil, deglaze the pan juices by scraping the bottom of the pan well with a wooden spoon. Boil until it reduces to about 3 tablespoons, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the reserved onions and the steaks; pour in the marinara sauce and stir. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer just until the onions are hot, 1 to 2 minutes. Garnish each serving with the chopped parsley.





## Braised Chicken With Marinara, Lemon & Olives

*Serves three to four.*

**2½ to 3 pounds bone-in, skin-on chicken legs and thighs, trimmed of excess skin and fat**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**3 tablespoons olive oil; more as needed**  
**12 cloves garlic, peeled and left whole**  
**3 medium onions, each cut into 6 wedges**  
**½ cup low-salt chicken broth or water**  
**1½ cups Marinara Sauce (recipe on p. 54)**  
**3 sprigs fresh thyme, 5 to 6 inches long**  
**4 paper-thin slices lemon (with peel)**  
**⅔ cup brine-cured olives, pitted and quartered**

Season the chicken with salt and pepper. In a large (10-inch) sauté pan, heat the oil over medium heat. Stir in the garlic and onions, season with salt, and cook gently until softened but not browned, about 10 minutes; stir occasionally and encourage the onions to break apart a bit. With a slotted spoon, transfer the vegetables and any small bits of garlic or onion to a plate.

If the pan looks dry, add another 1 tablespoon oil. Increase the heat to medium high and when the oil is hot, add the chicken, skin side down. Cook until well browned on both sides, 5 to 7 minutes per side. Transfer to a plate. Pour off and discard the oil in the pan. Return the pan to the heat and pour in the broth or water.

Scrape the pan with a wooden spoon to release any browned bits and cook until the liquid has reduced to about ¼ cup. Lower the heat to medium and return the garlic, onions, and chicken to the pan. Pour the marinara over the chicken and tuck in the thyme and lemon slices. Cover and simmer for 15 minutes, turning the chicken once halfway through. Stir in the olives and simmer, covered, until the chicken is cooked through (the juices should run clear when pricked), another 10 to 15 minutes.



## Spicy Clams & Sausage in Marinara

*Serves four to six.*

**4 dozen hard-shelled clams, about 2 inches wide (littlenecks are good)**  
**2 tablespoons olive oil; more for the bread**  
**8 large cloves garlic, minced; plus 1 clove sliced in half for the bread**  
**¼ teaspoon red chile flakes**  
**2 teaspoons fennel seeds**  
**¼ pound hot Italian sausage (casings removed), broken into pieces**  
**¾ cup dry white wine**  
**2 cups Marinara Sauce (recipe on p. 54)**  
**8 slices French or Italian bread, ½ inch thick**  
**3 tablespoons minced fresh flat-leaf parsley**

Cover the clams with cold water and use a stiff brush to scrub the shells; discard any clams that are open and won't close when thumped against another clam. Lift

the clams out of the water, discard the water and repeat washing two or three times, until no sand remains in the water.

Heat the oil in a large (5-quart) pot over medium-low heat. Add the minced garlic, red chile flakes, and fennel and cook, stirring often, until the garlic is translucent, about 5 minutes. Increase the heat to medium; add the sausage and cook until the outside is no longer pink, about 2 minutes. Increase the heat to medium high, pour in the wine, and boil until it has reduced to about 3 tablespoons, about 7 minutes. Stir in the marinara and bring to a quick boil. Put the clams in the pan, cover, and cook until they've opened, about 5 minutes; check often to avoid overcooking.

Meanwhile, toast the bread. Rub each toasted slice with the cut side of the garlic clove and brush with olive oil.

Serve the clams in wide bowls with the parsley sprinkled on top and the toast tucked into the sides.



wine choices

## Choose zingy, fruity red wines

With red sauces, my favorite wines are young, fruity reds with zippy acidity: They make for great weeknight drinking and are easy on the wallet, too. While there aren't too many rules when pairing wine with red sauces, just be sure the bottle you open doesn't have too much oak flavor or tannin: The combination of high acidity in the tomato sauce and tannins in the wine

can give the wine a bitter and unpleasant finish. Young Barbera, with its bright red fruit flavors and tart acidity, is just the thing. The 2001 Michele Chiarlo Barbera d'Asti (\$13), the 2000 Virna Barbera d'Alba (\$12), and the Vietti Barbera d'Asti "Tre Vigne" (\$18) are personal favorites.

*Tim Gaiser, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is a master sommelier.*



# Make five pasta sauces from one marinara

**If the marinara is already made, these variations on the basic sauce can be pulled together in the time it takes to cook the pasta. These sauces will all coat a pound of pasta to serve four.**

**BASIL MARINARA:** In a small saucepan, heat 3 tablespoons olive oil or butter. Pour in 3 cups marinara, bring to a boil, and then reduce the heat to a simmer. Stir in  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup torn basil leaves. Simmer for 5 minutes and toss with 1 pound warm pasta. Serve with freshly grated Parmesan.

**ARRABBIATA SAUCE:** In a medium saucepan, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium heat. Add  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound ( $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) finely diced pancetta or fatty prosciutto, 2 teaspoons minced garlic, and a scant  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon chile flakes; cook until the garlic is golden, 3 to 4 minutes. Add 3 cups marinara and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup torn basil leaves and simmer until hot. Toss with 1 pound warm pasta. Serve with freshly grated Parmesan.

**MOCK BOLOGNESE RAGÙ:** In a large sauté pan melt 3 tablespoons butter over medium heat. Add 1 cup finely chopped onion, 2 finely chopped cloves garlic, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup each very finely chopped carrot and celery; cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Increase the heat to medium high, add 1 pound ground beef, and cook until browned, breaking up the meat with a spoon, 4 to 5 minutes. Pour in  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup red wine and boil until reduced to 1 tablespoon, 3 to 5 minutes. Add 3 cups marinara and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cream or milk. Simmer until the sauce has thickened enough to softly mound on a spoon, about 8 minutes. Toss with 1 pound warm pasta. Serve with freshly grated Parmesan.

**PINK SAUCE:** In a large sauté pan over medium heat, melt 4 tablespoons butter. Pour in  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups heavy cream. Raise the heat to medium high, simmer, stirring often, until it has reduced to  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 cup, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup marinara and season with salt, pepper, and freshly grated nutmeg. Simmer until hot. Toss with 1 pound warm pasta. Serve with freshly grated Parmesan.

**PUTTANESCA SAUCE:** In a large sauté pan over medium heat, lightly brown 3 large cloves crushed garlic in 3 tablespoons olive oil, mashing the cloves into the oil with a spoon as they cook. Discard the garlic and mash 5 anchovy fillets (rinsed and patted dry) into the hot oil until they're dissolved, about 30 seconds. Stir in  $2\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons rinsed capers and  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon chile flakes and cook for 3 minutes. Add 3 cups marinara,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup pitted, quartered black olives,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons dried oregano, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup very roughly chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley. Simmer until hot. Toss with 1 pound warm pasta. Serve with freshly grated Romano cheese.



creamy pink sauce



bright and briny puttanesca

*Nancy Verde Barr is the author of Make It Italian: The Taste and Technique of Italian Home Cooking. ♦*



# Classic Focaccia

## It's easier than you think



BY PETER REINHART

**A**rgue that great focaccia, like great pizza, is all about the crust. And I can show you how to make focaccia so delicious that you might even forget about topping it. I've been teaching baking students how to make it for ten years and, I swear, extraordinary focaccia takes very little effort. What it does take, though, is patience. Time is the secret to great dough.

### **Time + wet dough = the best focaccia**

The following recipe uses a cold fermentation technique. In other words, the dough sits in the refrigerator overnight. The cold dramatically slows yeast activity, allowing enzymes in the flour to coax more flavor from the flour's complex starch molecules. This simple tactic alone will take you far. But an-

other trick will take you even farther: making a wet, sticky dough. (Don't worry; the olive oil in the recipe makes it possible to handle the dough.) A wet dough creates a crust with large, irregular holes that soak up the wonderful flavors of the olive oil.

In Liguria, the coastal region in northwest Italy where focaccia originated, the bread has evolved from simple peasant food—just dough topped with whatever ingredients are handy—into an art form with many variations. It can be a savory snack or an entire meal. It can be round or rectangular; thin or thick. It can even be sweet. What unites the variations is great dough. Master that and you're free to be as creative as you like with toppings (for ideas, see p. 61), bearing in mind the principle that sometimes less is more.





Although the making of this recipe is spread over two days, the actual hands-on time is quite short. After you mix the dough, it rises overnight in the refrigerator, where the cold slows yeast activity dramatically. This is the key to truly flavorful focaccia.

### Basic Focaccia

*Yields a 13x18-inch loaf; 12 to 15 pieces.*

- 1 pound 9 ounces (5½ cups) unbleached bread flour (for sources, see p. 78)**
- 2½ cups cold water (about 55°F)**
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon granulated sugar (1 ounce)**
- 2 teaspoons table salt or 3½ teaspoons kosher salt (½ ounce)**
- 1 packet (¼ ounce) instant yeast (also called quick-rise, rapid-rise, or fast-rising yeast)**
- 10 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- Sea salt or kosher salt for sprinkling**

### No mixer? Just mix it by hand.

Combine the flour, water, sugar, salt, and yeast in a large stainless-steel bowl; have a bowl of lukewarm water standing by. With a large wet spoon or one hand, mix the ingredients. Repeatedly dipping the spoon or your hand in the water will help keep the dough from sticking. Rotate the bowl with your free hand while stirring with the other until a wet, shaggy dough forms, 2 to 3 minutes. Let the dough rest for 5 minutes and then mix for another 2 minutes until the dough is relatively smooth but quite sticky. Proceed to step 1 at right.

### The day before baking, mix the dough and let it spend the night in the refrigerator.

Combine the flour, water, sugar, salt, and yeast in the large bowl of a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment, not the dough hook). Slowly mix until the ingredients form a ball around the paddle, about 30 seconds. Switch to the dough hook and mix on medium low for another 3 minutes. Stop the machine to scrape the dough off the hook; let the dough rest for 5 minutes and then mix on medium low for another 3 minutes, until it's relatively smooth.

**1** At this point, the dough will resemble melted mozzarella and be very sticky. If you stretch a small piece, it will barely hold together.

Coat a bowl large enough to hold the dough when it doubles in size with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Transfer the dough to the bowl and rotate the dough to coat it with the oil.

**2** Hold the bowl steady with one hand. Wet the other hand in water, grasp the dough and stretch it to nearly twice its size.

**3** Lay the stretched section back over the dough. Rotate the bowl a quarter turn and repeat this stretch-and-fold technique. Do this two more times so that you have rotated the bowl a full 360 degrees and stretched and folded the dough four times. Drizzle 1 tablespoon of the olive oil over the dough and flip it over. Wrap the bowl well with plastic and refrigerate it overnight, or for at least 8 to 10 hours.



Three hours before baking, shape the focaccia and let it rise.



Remove the bowl of dough from the refrigerator and start shaping the focaccia 3 hours before you intend to bake it (2 hours on a warm day). The dough will have nearly doubled in size. Cover a 13x18-inch rimmed baking sheet with parchment or a silicone baking mat and coat the surface with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil.

**4** Gently slide a rubber spatula or a dough scraper under the dough and guide it out of the bowl onto the center of the pan. The dough will sink beneath its own weight, expelling some gas but retaining enough to keep an airy gluten network that will grow into nice holes.

**5** Drizzle 2 tablespoons of the olive oil on top of the dough. (Don't worry if some rolls off onto the pan; it will all be absorbed eventually.)

**6** Dimple the entire dough surface, working from the center to the edges, pressing your fingertips straight down to create hollows in the dough while gently pushing the dough down and out toward the edges of the pan. At first you might only be able to spread the dough to cover about one-half to three-quarters of the pan. Don't force the dough when it begins to resist you. Set it aside to rest for 20 minutes. The oil will prevent a crust from forming.

After letting the dough rest, drizzle another 2 tablespoons olive oil over the dough's surface and dimple again. This time, you will be able to push the dough to fill or almost fill the entire pan. It should be about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick. If it doesn't stay in the corners, don't worry; the dough will fill the corners as it rises.

Cover the dough loosely with oiled plastic wrap, put the pan on a rack to let air circulate around it, and let the dough rise at room temperature until it's about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times its original size and swells to the rim of the pan. This will take 2 to 3 hours, depending on the temperature of the room.

Bake the focaccia and let it cool before serving.

Thirty minutes before baking, heat your oven to 475°F.

**7** Just before baking, gently remove the plastic wrap and sprinkle a few pinches of sea salt or kosher salt over the dough. Put the pan in the middle of the hot oven and reduce the heat to 450°F. After 15 minutes, rotate the pan to ensure even baking.

**8** Check the dough after another 7 minutes. If it's done, it will be golden brown on top and, if you lift a corner of the dough, the underside will be golden as well. If not, return the pan to the oven for another 1 to 2 minutes and check again.

Set a cooling rack over a sheet of aluminum foil or parchment (to catch drippings). Use a metal spatula to release the dough from the sides of the pan. Slide the spatula under one end of the focaccia and jiggle it out of the pan onto the rack. If any oil remains in the pan, pour it evenly over the focaccia's surface. Carefully remove the parchment or silicone liner from beneath the focaccia. Let cool for 20 minutes before cutting and serving.





# Dress up your focaccia

The possibilities for topping focaccia are almost endless. Choose what sounds good to you, knowing that toppings fall into three general categories.

## Pre-rise toppings

are best pressed into the dough during or after the final dimpling stage (step 6) to embed them in the dough so they don't burn during baking. These include:

- oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and sliced or chopped
- fresh herbs
- roasted garlic
- pitted olives
- dried fruits, such as raisins or apricots (plumped overnight in water or liqueur)

**Toppings that need to be brushed or dolloped on should also be added after the final dimpling but before the final rise:**

- tomato sauce
- pesto
- tapenade



## Pre-bake toppings

aren't as vulnerable to burning. They can be added after the dough has risen and is ready to go in the oven (step 7). Here are a few of my favorites:

- dabs of moist cheese: blue, fresh mozzarella, or feta
- oven-roasted tomatoes or sliced fresh Italian plum tomatoes
- roasted or sautéed bell peppers, eggplant, mushrooms, spinach, or caramelized onions, thinly sliced or chopped
- walnuts, pecans, or pine nuts, coarsely chopped
- Italian sausage (partially cooked and drained of excess fat), salami, or pepperoni, thinly sliced
- a sprinkling of coarse salt or sugar

## Last-minute toppings

are sprinkled on just minutes before the focaccia is ready to come out of the oven (step 8). Try grated hard cheeses such as:

- Parmigiano Reggiano
- Romano
- Asiago

## Anise-Raisin Topping

*Yields enough topping for one 13x18-inch pan of focaccia.*

This classic sweet topping makes a focaccia that's great for brunch, tea, or an afternoon snack. This version gets its kick from anise liqueur.

- 1 cup golden raisins
- 1 tablespoon aniseed
- ½ cup Sambuca, Anisette, or other anise liqueur
- ½ cup water
- 2 tablespoons granulated, coarse, or turbinado sugar

After you've made the dough (a day before baking), put the raisins and aniseed in a bowl with the liqueur and water. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit overnight at room temperature.

The next day, when you shape the dough, drain the raisins and aniseed, reserving any leftover liquid. Sprinkle the raisins and seeds onto the dough along with the olive oil in step 5 and dimple the dough as described in step 6, taking care to distribute them evenly throughout the dough during each successive dimpling. Try to press the raisins firmly into the dough so that the dough will partially cover them as it rises. Let the dough rise as directed at the end of step 6.

Just before the focaccia goes into the oven, sprinkle 1 tablespoon of the sugar (instead of salt) over the surface and then bake as directed at left. Meanwhile, simmer the raisin-soaking liquid in a saucepan over medium-low to medium heat and reduce it to a syrup, 8 to 10 minutes. Immediately after removing the focaccia from the oven, brush it with the syrup and sprinkle on the remaining 1 tablespoon sugar. Let cool on a rack for 20 minutes before cutting and serving.

# Lemon Desserts

## from Subtle to Sassy

I love everything about lemons and think life would be boring and tasteless without them. A lemon's aroma, flavor, and piquancy add a freshness that's essential to good food. A lemon's tartness is the perfect complement to sweetness and richness, and it's because of this that lemons are especially wonderful in desserts. What's more, a lemon is two fruits in one: you get both the fragrant flavor of the zest and the spirited zing of the juice.

### **Zest adds fragrance and packs flavor**

For me, much of the joy of a lemon is in the zest, which I think is aptly named for its insistent lemon flavor.

**Zest isn't the entire peel, but only the thin, outermost, bright-yellow layer of the lemon,** with none of the underlying white pith attached. Lemon zest is much more than just pretty packaging: Fragrant with aromatic natural oils, the zest brings complex floral and tangy flavors, as well as freshness, aroma, and subtlety. If you want to intensify the lemon flavor in any dessert, most often the best thing to do is to add finely grated lemon zest rather than

more juice. Zest adds zip, yet it won't affect the sweet-sour or liquid-solid balance of the recipe. Add a little at a time and keep tasting after each addition, as too much can impart a bitter flavor. Before zesting, be sure to scrub lemons thoroughly to remove the water-soluble wax coating that's added to protect them during shipping.

For grating, I always use a Microplane (for sources, see p. 78). Its razor-sharp teeth shave the zest rather than rip or shred it, releasing more essential oils and removing more of the zest than other graters and gadgets. You'll get at least a tablespoon of fine, feathery zest from each large lemon. A Microplane also seems to solve another problem. Other graters tend to nick at the lemon peel, yielding much less grated zest yet grabbing the pith right along with the zest. The Microplane grabs only the yellow zest—a minor miracle in itself. For more about zesting, see the sidebar on p. 64.

### **Juice gives tang and balance**

Lemon juice is wonderfully tangy and refreshing; it's perfect for balancing flavors in a

Don't forget the zest—these desserts get a sunny blast of flavor from not only the juice but also the zest, rich in aromatic oils

BY LORI LONGBOTHAM

Gingered Lemon Bars

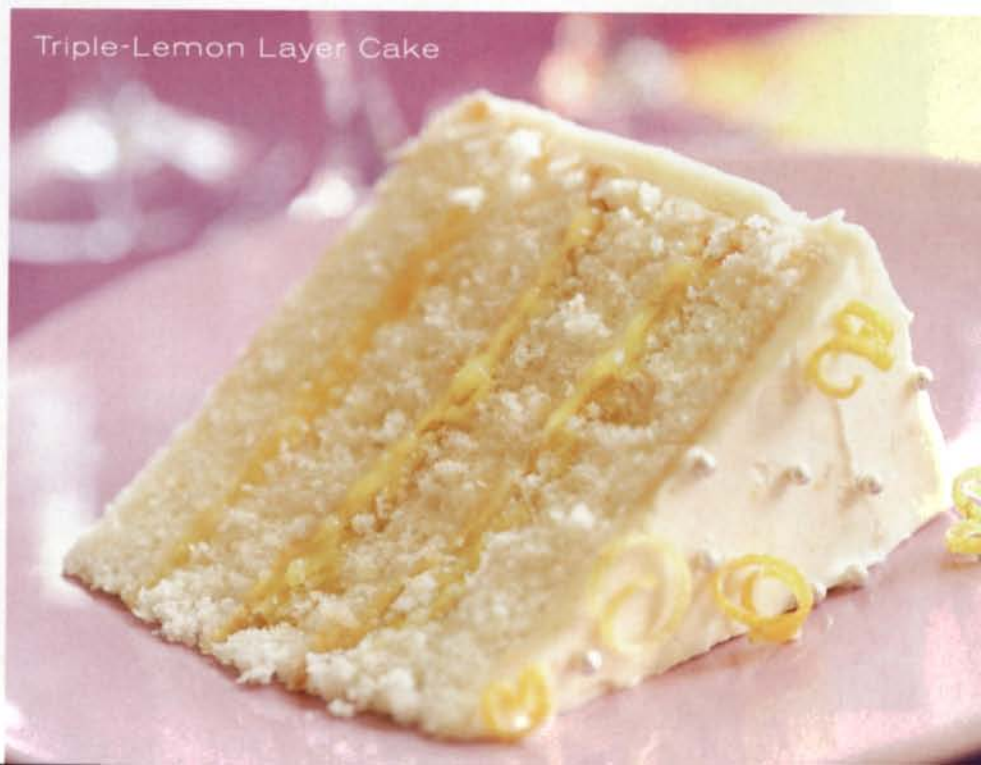




Lemon Tea Cake



Silky Lemon Pudding



Triple-Lemon Layer Cake



dessert. There are lots of ways to juice lemons, but the tool I like best is a simple juicer with a ridged cone set in a dish. The reason I love these is because they strain the seeds but include the pulp, which I often add with the juice for added lemony flavor and great texture. Whether I use my electric or manual model depends on my mood—and how much juice I need. (For another lemon juicer, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 72.)

**For easiest juicing, roll a room-temperature lemon on the counter** a few times, applying pressure with your palm (or drop it into hot water for a few minutes) before squeezing. Covered in the refrigerator, fresh lemon juice keeps well for three days. You can even freeze it; it will maintain its lemony zip for three months.



## Zesting tips

In addition to using a Microplane, Lori Longbotham offers other ways to get the most out of each lemon you zest.

- ❖ If you'll be using both the juice and the zest of a lemon, grate or peel the zest first.
- ❖ When grating lemon zest, you want just the thin yellow top coat

## Gingered Lemon Bars

*Yields 16 two-inch bars.*

I'm a total ginger lover, but if you're not, feel free to leave it out of these bars—you'll still get a luscious, tart and tangy, sweet lemon bar. To cut the neatest squares, use a flat metal spatula or a bench scraper and cut straight down.

**5 ounces (1 cup plus 2 tablespoons) all-purpose flour**

**6¼ ounces (1¾ cups plus 1 teaspoon) confectioners' sugar**

**1 tablespoon lightly packed finely grated lemon zest**

**½ teaspoon plus a tiny pinch ground ginger**

**Table salt**

**4 ounces (½ cup) chilled unsalted butter, cut into small pieces; more for the pan**

**½ teaspoon baking powder**

**3 large eggs, at room temperature**

**6 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter an 8-inch square baking pan.

In a medium bowl, whisk 1 cup (4½ ounces) of the flour with ¼ cup of the confectioners' sugar, the lemon zest, ½ teaspoon of the ginger, and a pinch of salt. Cut in the butter with a pastry blender or two table knives until the mixture resembles small peas. Knead the dough in the bowl just until it be-



gins to come together. Transfer the dough to the baking pan and, with floured hands, press it evenly over the bottom. Bake until very light golden brown, about 20 minutes. Let cool on a rack while you make the filling.

In a small bowl, whisk 1½ cups of the confectioners' sugar, the remaining 2 tablespoons (½ ounce) flour, the baking powder, and a pinch of salt. In a medium bowl, beat the eggs with an electric mixer on high speed until tripled in volume, pale yellow, and very light and fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes (the eggs will hold soft peaks very briefly). Reduce the speed to low, add the sugar and flour mixture, and beat just until

blended, scraping the bowl as needed. Add the lemon juice and beat just until blended. Pour the lemon mixture over the warm crust.

Bake until the filling is just set in the center, is golden brown on top, and doesn't jiggle when the pan is nudged, 18 to 20 minutes. Let cool completely in the pan on a rack. Just before serving, stir the remaining 1 teaspoon confectioners' sugar with the pinch of ginger in a small bowl. Transfer to a small sieve and sift over the lemon filling. Using a bench scraper or a metal spatula, cut into 2-inch squares, slicing straight down (rather than dragging). Store in an airtight container.

of the skin. Overzealous grating will result in bitter flavors.

- ❖ The lemon's volatile oils are strongest just after zesting, so remove the zest just before using.
- ❖ Grate lemon zest over waxed paper to make it easier to gather for measuring.

❖ Finely grated zest releases more flavor than larger strips.

❖ If you have more lemons on hand than you can use, grate or peel the zest, juice the lemons, and then freeze the zest and juice separately. Well wrapped, they'll keep for up to three months.



### Silky Lemon Pudding

*Yields about 3 1/3 cups; serves four.*

This simple pudding gives me comfort and makes me happy. Taste the pudding while it's still hot. If it's too tart for you, whisk in a tablespoon or so of granulated sugar, but remember that chilling mutes flavors.

**2 1/4 cups whole milk**  
**1/2 cup packed light brown sugar**  
**1/2 cup granulated sugar**  
**1/4 cup cornstarch**  
**4 large egg yolks**  
**2 tablespoons lightly packed finely grated lemon zest**  
**Pinch salt**  
**1/2 cup fresh lemon juice**  
**3 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature**  
**Whipped cream and candied violets for garnish (optional)**

In a medium saucepan off the heat, whisk together the milk, both sugars, and cornstarch until smooth. Whisk in the egg yolks, lemon zest, and salt. Set over medium heat and cook, whisking frequently at first and constantly toward the end, until thickened and the whisk leaves a very defined trail in the pudding, 9 to 12 minutes.

Remove the pan from the heat, add the lemon juice and butter, and stir until incorporated. Pour through a coarse sieve into a large serving bowl or four individual serving dishes. Let cool to room temperature. Refrigerate, loosely covered, until set and thoroughly chilled, at least 2 hours or up to two days. Serve chilled with whipped cream and candied violets, if you like (for sources, see p. 78).



### Lemon Tea Cake

*Yields one 4 1/2x8 1/2-inch loaf; serves ten to twelve.*

Check the ingredient list of this delightful, not-too-sweet cake: You'll find the surprising elements of coriander and caraway seeds. The caraway is a perfect contrast to the lemon, while the coriander adds a floral, lemony flavor of its own.

**9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour; more for the pan**  
**2 teaspoons baking powder**  
**1/2 teaspoon table salt**  
**4 ounces (1/2 cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature; more for the pan**  
**1/4 cup lightly packed finely grated lemon zest**  
**1 cup granulated sugar**  
**2 large eggs, at room temperature**  
**2 teaspoons ground coriander**  
**3/4 teaspoon ground mace**  
**3/4 cup whole milk, at room temperature**  
**2 teaspoons caraway seeds**  
**Lemon Curd for serving (optional; see the recipe and sidebar on p. 66)**

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Generously butter and flour a 4 1/2x8 1/2-inch loaf pan (Pyrex is fine).

Sift the flour, baking powder, and salt together into a medium bowl.

In a large bowl, beat the butter and lemon zest with an electric mixer on medium speed until light and smooth, about 1 minute (if you're using a stand mixer, use the paddle attachment). Add the sugar, eggs, coriander, and mace; beat until smooth. Add half of the milk and beat just until blended (the batter may look curdled; that's fine). Reduce the speed to low, add the flour mixture in two batches, beating just until blended and scraping the bowl with a rubber spatula as needed. Add the remaining milk and mix on low just until blended. Stir in the caraway seeds with a rubber spatula. Transfer the mixture to the prepared pan and smooth the top with a rubber spatula.

Bake until a wooden pick inserted in the center comes out clean, 60 to 65 minutes. Let cool in the pan on a rack for 10 minutes. Run a table knife around the inside of the pan, invert the cake out of the pan, flip it right side up onto the rack, and let it cool completely. (The cake will keep, tightly wrapped, at room temperature for up to three days.) Use a serrated knife to slice (the slices are fragile, so take care not to make them too thin). Serve with lemon curd, if you like.

## Add lemon curd to your sweet pantry

The lemon curd recipe below is the filling for the layer cake at right. Lemon curd is a lovely accompaniment to the tea cake on p. 65, too, and if you're a true lemonhead, you could even dollop some on the lemon pudding on p. 65. But don't stop there: Try lemon curd on your morning toast, scone, or muffin, in tarts or tartlets, over fresh fruit, gingerbread, or angel food or pound cake. My recipe calls for egg yolks only, no whites, which means you don't need a double boiler, so this curd is easy to prepare.

Lemon curd keeps for a month in the refrigerator and for up to three months in the freezer. For the Triple-Lemon Layer Cake, I recommend making my curd recipe, since store-bought curds vary greatly in consistency and flavor. But to serve with toast or scones or as a garnish, a good store-bought lemon curd is just fine (see p. 78 for *Fine Cooking's* recommendations).

### Lemon Curd

*Yields about 1 1/4 cups.*

**4 ounces (1/2 cup) unsalted butter**  
**3/4 cup granulated sugar**  
**1/2 cup fresh lemon juice**  
**3 tablespoons lightly packed finely grated lemon zest**  
**Pinch salt**  
**6 large egg yolks**

Melt the butter in a heavy medium saucepan over medium heat. Remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the sugar, lemon juice, zest, and salt.

Whisk in the yolks until smooth. Return the pan to medium-low heat and cook, whisking constantly, until the mixture thickens, 5 to 6 minutes. To check if the curd is thick enough, dip a wooden spoon into it and draw your

finger across the back of the spoon; your finger should leave a path. Don't let the mixture boil. Immediately force the curd through a fine sieve into a bowl, using a rubber spatula. Let cool to room temperature, whisking occasionally. Refrigerate, covered, until ready to use.



### Triple-Lemon Layer Cake

*Serves eight to ten.*

This light and tender cake flavored with lemon, layered with tangy lemon curd, and coated with a voluptuous lemony butter frosting will make any birthday happy. But why wait until then?

FOR THE CAKE:

**9 1/4 ounces (2 1/3 cups) cake flour; more for the pans**  
**2 3/4 teaspoons baking powder**  
**1/4 teaspoon table salt**  
**1 1/4 cups granulated sugar**  
**2 tablespoons lightly packed finely grated lemon zest**  
**6 ounces (3/4 cup) unsalted butter, completely softened at room temperature; more for the pans**  
**1 cup whole milk, at room temperature**  
**5 large egg whites, at room temperature**  
**1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar**

FOR THE FILLING:

**1 recipe Lemon Curd (at left), chilled**

FOR THE FROSTING:

**8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, completely softened at room temperature**  
**2 tablespoons lightly packed finely grated lemon zest**  
**3 1/2 cups sifted confectioners' sugar**  
**3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**

FOR GARNISH:

**2 lemons, zested with a channel zester and silver dragées (both optional; for sources, see p. 78)**

**Make the cake:** Position a rack in the middle of the oven; heat the oven to 350°F. Generously butter and flour two 8x2-inch round cake pans. Sift the cake flour, baking powder, and salt together into a medium bowl. Pulse 1/4 cup of the sugar with the zest in a food processor until well combined.

In a large bowl, beat the butter and lemon sugar with an electric mixer on medium speed until light and fluffy (about 1 1/2 minutes). Add the remaining 1 1/2 cups sugar and beat until smooth (about 1 1/2 minutes). Beat in a quarter of the milk just until blended. On low speed, add the flour mixture alternately with the milk in three batches, scraping the bowl with a rubber spatula; beat just until blended.

In another large bowl, beat the egg whites with an electric mixer (with clean beaters or the whip attachment) on

medium speed just until foamy. Add the cream of tartar, increase the speed to medium high, and beat just until the whites form stiff peaks when the beaters are lifted. Add a quarter of the whites to the batter and gently fold them in with a whisk or a rubber spatula; continue to gently fold in the whites, a quarter at a time, being careful not to deflate the mixture.

Divide the batter evenly between the prepared pans. Smooth the tops with the spatula. Bake until a pick inserted in the centers comes out clean, 35 to 40 minutes. Let cool in the pans on a rack for 10 minutes. Run a table knife around the inside of the pans and carefully invert each cake out onto the rack. Flip them right side up and let cool completely.

With the palm of one hand pressed on top of a cake layer, cut each in half horizontally, using a long serrated knife. Put one of the four cake layers on a serving plate, cut side up. With an offset spatula or a table knife, spread a generous 1/3 cup chilled lemon curd on top of the cake layer. Lay another cake layer on top, spread it with another generous 1/3 cup lemon curd, and repeat with the third cake layer, using the last 1/3 cup lemon curd. Top with the fourth cake layer.

**Make the frosting:** In a medium bowl, beat the butter and lemon zest with an electric mixer on medium speed until light and fluffy. Add the confectioners' sugar in batches and beat until light and fluffy. Add the lemon juice and beat for 1 minute. (You can make the frosting a couple of hours ahead and keep it, covered, at cool room temperature.)

**Frost the cake:** Up to a few hours before serving, spread a thin layer of frosting on the cake (see the photo opposite), filling in any gaps as you go. Chill until the frosting firms a bit, about 1/2 hour. Spread the remaining frosting decoratively over the top and sides of the cake. Scatter with bits of lemon zest and dragées, or garnish as you like.



## Assembling the cake



*Holding a serrated knife parallel to the work surface, halve each cake layer, using a sawing motion.*



*With an offset spatula or a table knife, spread the lemon curd over the cake layer. Use a generous  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup.*



*To create curls of zest, strip the zest from two lemons with a channel zester. Cover the strands loosely with a damp paper towel; they'll curl as they begin to dry.*



*Ice the cake first with a thin "crumb coat" and chill before applying a second thicker coat. This will keep crumbs from catching on your spatula and marring the finished cake.*

BY JENNIFER ARMENTROUT

**H**ere's a true story: I recently went to an upscale national chain supermarket in search of mussels. All the mussels on display were tagged with a harvest date that was more than two weeks earlier. When I asked if they had anything fresher, they produced some from the back cooler that bore a much more recent harvest date.

A few days later, I was in search of sea scallops.

**Don't be too polite to ask for the fresh stuff when you're at the market.**

At a local gourmet market, I asked the counterwoman if I could smell the scallops first. His response: "I'll get the fresh ones from the back."

The moral of this story is obvious: Be discriminating when buying fresh foods, especially highly perishable ones. The less-than-fresh specimens I encountered weren't necessarily rotten, but for my money, I want the best the store has to offer, especially when it costs the same as the older stuff and tastes a million bucks better. Don't be too polite to ask.

at the market

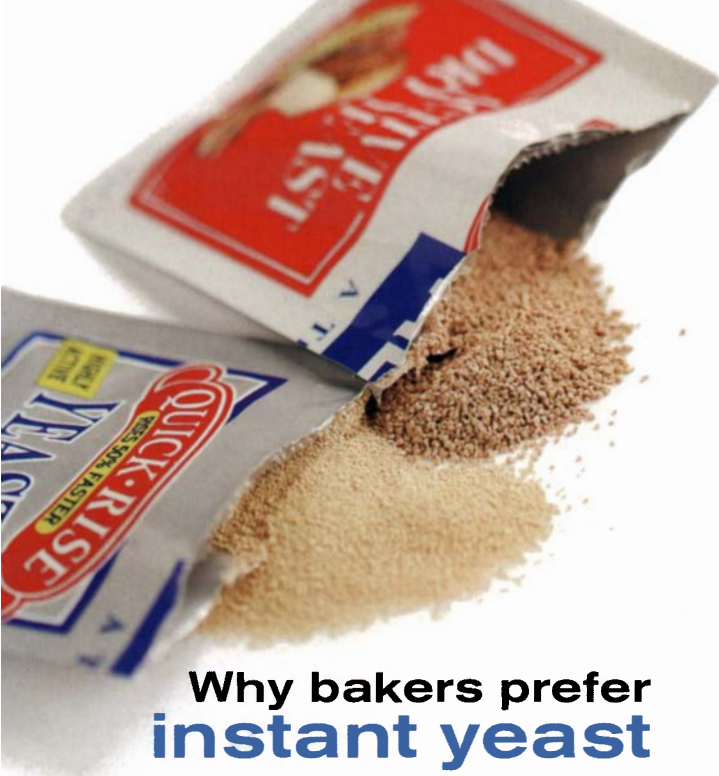
## BROCCOLINI

The next time you're trolling the produce aisle for a green vegetable, consider giving broccolini a try. Although it's been on the market for several years, it's still relatively new to the vegetable scene. Also known as baby broccoli or asparagion, it's a conventional (as opposed to bioengineered) hybrid of broccoli and Chinese kale (*gai lan*). Its sweet and mild flavor hints of broccoli. The entire stalk is edible and requires no trimming. I like to steam broccolini until it's just tender (6 to 7 minutes) and then drizzle it with salted lemon butter.

**tip:** To pit olives without the aid of an olive-pitting tool, spread the olives on a cutting board and press down on them in a smearing motion with the bottom of a small saucepan or skillet. The olives will crack and the pits will squeeze partially out. Finish pitting with your fingers.







## Why bakers prefer instant yeast

In the Classic Focaccia recipe on p. 59, author Peter Reinhart sings the praises of the long, slow rise. But at the same time, he uses instant yeast (also called quick-rise, rapid-rise, or fast-rising yeast) to leaven the dough. At first, that might seem contradictory, yet it isn't. "Quick-rise yeast is really misnamed," Reinhart explains. "Cell for cell, the yeast is no more potent than active dry yeast or fresh compressed yeast." But because of the way it's processed, instant yeast grains are small enough to be mixed directly ("instantly") into dry ingredients without first being dissolved in water and proofed, a requirement with active dry yeast.

More important, instant yeast is highly concentrated, so you can use 25 percent less of it:

**$\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon instant yeast  
equals**

**1 teaspoon active dry**

So with instant yeast, you can abide by the artisan baker's maxim and "use just enough yeast to get the job done and no more." Using less yeast can prolong the rising time, but "this allows time for natural sugars in the flour to break out of the starch molecules and produce more flavor," Reinhart says—precisely why bakers love the long, slow rise.

—Kimberly Y. Masibay, associate editor

### knife skills

## Pepper prep

There's more than one way to get the seeds out of a pepper, but some are more efficient than others. My favorite method for trimming bell peppers hardly disturbs the seed core at all, which means I don't have many errant seeds to chase off the cutting board.

When I'm working with hot chiles, my main concern is keeping the juices off my hands. Even after washing your hands, the hot stuff (called capsaicin) can linger on your skin and come back to haunt you later if you rub your eyes. The best way to prevent this is to wear a disposable rubber glove on the hand that holds the chile. Follow the steps below for the easiest seeding. (For more about capsaicin, see p. 28).



**Seeding sweet bell peppers**

*1. Cut the bottom off the pepper and then stand it upright on the cut surface.*



*2. Imagine the sides of the pepper are a box surrounding the seed core and cut off the four sides of the box, leaving the seed core and stem in one easily discardable piece. Trim the pithy white ribs from the sides and base, if necessary, and then slice or dice as needed.*

## Seeding hot chiles



*Cut the chile in half lengthwise and then, depending on how delicate the chile is, use a small spoon or a paring knife to scrape or trim away the seeds and ribs. Use your gloved hand or the knife to scrape the trimmings into the trash and wash the cutting board well to avoid transferring capsaicin to other foods.*

## Serious searing

When searing the beef for the beef stews on p. 36, the swell of smoke and spattering of fat can be startling. But don't be intimidated by a hot pan and this aggressive



sear. There's a big payoff to developing that deep brown crust. Searing intensifies the meat's flavor and consequently enriches the stew's liquid for a well-rounded, rich, and beefy-tasting stew.

—Maryellen Driscoll,  
editor at large

## Choosing chuck: Shopping for beef stew meat

**F**or a beef stew with fork-tender texture and robust, beefy flavor, chuck is the ideal cut. But not all cuts of chuck are the same. A single chuck contains a complicated network of muscles (from the steer's shoulder and upper arm) that can weigh as much as 100 pounds, so it's no surprise that smaller cuts from the chuck will vary greatly.



chuck eye

Choose a cut with the fewest muscles (distinguished by their slightly different grains and dividing lines of fat or gristle). Different muscles cook at different rates, so the fewer the muscles, the more evenly your stew will cook. The best cuts to look for are top blade, chuck eye, and arm pot roast. Also look for thin streaks and small specks of fat—called marbling—running throughout the meat. The fat melts during cooking and bastes the meat internally so it becomes moist and tender. Don't confuse marbling with the thicker strips of fat that separate distinct muscles.

—Molly Stevens, contributing editor

**tip:** Rub dried herbs between the palms of your hands before using them. This crushing action helps release their flavor.



## What we mean by... a sprig

When a recipe calls for a "sprig" of a fresh herb like thyme, rosemary, or mint, how much is that? While there isn't a truly clear-cut answer, you can follow this guideline. Unless the recipe specifies otherwise, I think of a sprig as a single stem of a fresh herb about 4 inches long. But if the herbs I'm working with seem to be unusually sparse or bodacious, I'll use a little more or less accordingly.



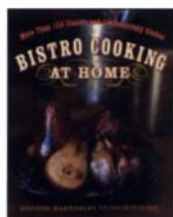
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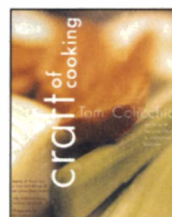
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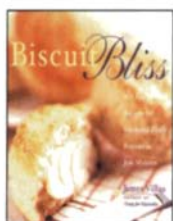
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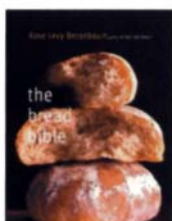
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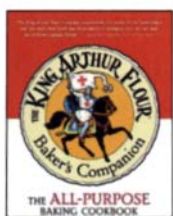
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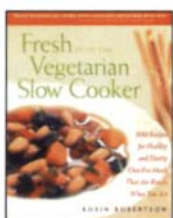
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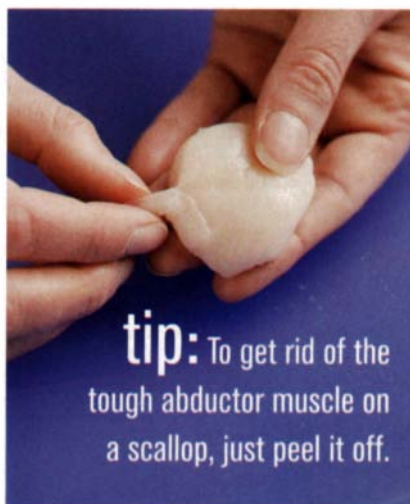
## A versatile juicer for citrus fruits

We have an impressive collection of citrus juicing tools in the test kitchen, from fancy electric ones to simple hand reamers. But recently, when I was juicing dozens of lemons for the lemon desserts in this issue, the juicer I reached for most often was this Oxo Good Grips model. It's low-tech but cleverly designed, with a couple of very useful features: Small and large reamers are built opposite each other in one piece, so to go from juicing lemons to oranges, all you have to do is flip the reamer part over—no rooting around in drawers to find the extra reamer part. The cup below the reamer is marked with measures so you don't need to transfer the juice to a separate measuring cup—a simple, obvious detail that's inexplicably missing from lots of other juicers. For a mail-order source, see p. 78.

## “Dry” scallops sear better, taste better

When you're at the fish counter, you'll often see sea scallops labeled two ways—“dry” and “wet.” (If they're not marked, ask.) Whenever you can, choose the dry scallops. “Wet” scallops have been treated with a solution called STP (sodium tripolyphosphate), which helps the scallops maintain their moisture (they're made up of about 75% water when fresh). The STP solution gives scallops a longer shelf life; they don't dry out or lose their plump appearance. As a result, you'll not only pay for the added water weight (and often get scallops that are less than fresh), but you'll also have trouble browning these scallops—no matter how hot your pan or oven—because of all that excess moisture. The STP solution can also give scallops a rubbery texture and cloud the mollusk's sweet, delicate flavor.

—Tony Rosenfeld,  
contributing editor



## How much juice will you get?

### Lemon

1 medium (5-ounce) lemon yields about 4 to 5 tablespoons unstrained juice

### Orange

1 medium (10-ounce) navel orange yields about 6 to 7 tablespoons unstrained juice

### Lime

1 medium (4-ounce) lime yields about 3 to 4 tablespoons unstrained juice





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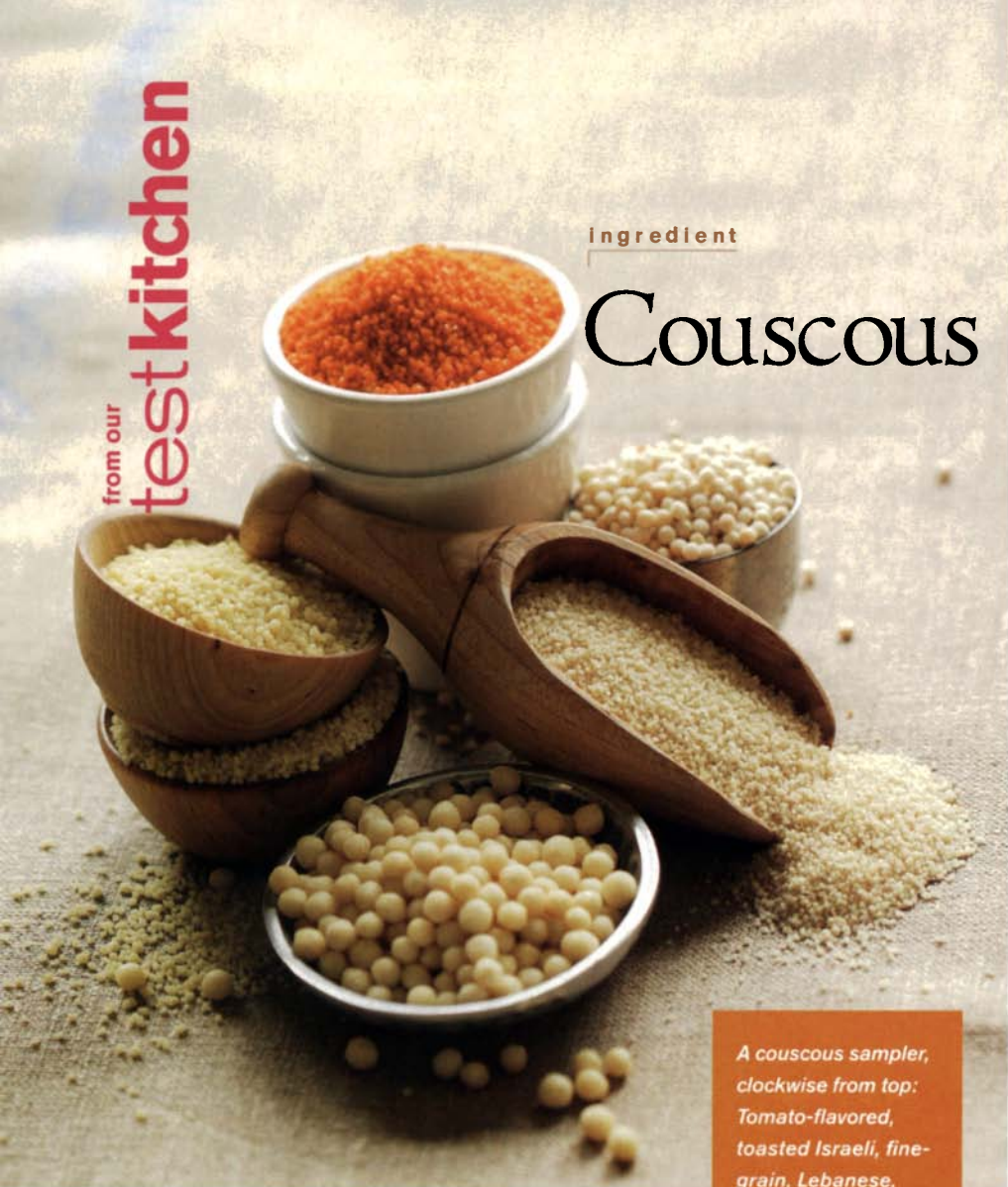
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Ingredient

# Couscous



*A couscous sampler, clockwise from top: Tomato-flavored, toasted Israeli, fine-grain, Lebanese, and medium-grain (Moroccan) couscous.*

Is couscous a grain or a pasta? Neither, really. A Middle Eastern and North African staple, couscous is simply durum semolina (the wheat flour from which most Italian pastas are made) that has been lightly moistened with salted water and rolled into little granules. Medium-grain (also called Moroccan) couscous is widely available in the U.S., but it's hardly the only option. At Middle Eastern groceries, you'll see varieties as fine as sand and as large as baby peas.

## How to use it:

Traditionally, couscous is steamed in a couscoussière over broth or water and served with butter or with stewed vegetables or meats. But many recipes (like the one at right) suggest simply mixing couscous into boiling liquid and setting it aside to swell and soften. Although this method sacrifices

a certain degree of fluffiness for convenience, it does work quite well for medium and fine couscous. Larger-grained versions can be steamed in a couscoussière or simmered in broth or water until tender.

## How to buy & store it:

Most supermarkets carry several brands of medium (Moroccan) couscous, but if you want to choose from a full range of sizes, try Middle Eastern markets, natural-foods stores, or mail-order sources (see p. 78). Store couscous in sealed containers or bags to keep out moisture. At room temperature or cooler, it will keep well for a year.

—K. Y. M.



## Spiced Couscous Pilaf with Almonds, Currants & Mint

*Serves four to six.*

Warm Middle Eastern spices and fresh mint make this pilaf a great accompaniment to lamb roasts or chops, seared scallops, roast chicken, or sausages. Serve the couscous loose, or for a more formal presentation, you can make timbales by packing the couscous into ramekins and unmolding them onto your serving plates.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 small onion, finely diced (about ¾ cup)**
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt**
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin**
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander**
- ½ teaspoon ground turmeric**
- Pinch ground cinnamon**
- 1¼ cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth (one 14-ounce can)**
- ¼ cup dried currants**
- 1 cup medium-grain (Moroccan) couscous**
- ⅓ cup chopped fresh mint**
- ¼ cup slivered almonds, toasted**
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice;**  
**more to taste**

Heat the oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and ¼ teaspoon of the salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion is very soft, about 7 minutes. Add the cumin, coriander, turmeric, and cinnamon, and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Stir in the broth, increase the heat to high, and bring to a boil. Add the currants, cover, remove the pan from the heat, and let sit for 10 minutes so the currants can plump.

Return the broth to a boil over high heat. Stir in the couscous and the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, cover, remove from the heat, and let sit for 5 to 7 minutes. Scrape a fork through the couscous to fluff it. Add the mint and almonds and stir them into the couscous with the fork. As you stir, sprinkle on the lemon juice to taste. Serve immediately.



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\* See Attached Bonus Cookbook, *Favorite Recipes*, for this ad.

tasting panel

# dried tomatoes in oil

With their concentrated flavor and pleasantly chewy texture, dried tomatoes can add zest to salads, sandwiches, omelets, and pasta dishes. To see which brands are best to use, we invited nine *Fine Cooking* staffers to a blind tasting of widely available brands of oil-packed dried tomatoes. (Some were labeled “sun-dried,” others simply “dried.”) The tomatoes were tasted plain at room temperature and evaluated for flavor, texture, appearance, and overall likability. Here’s a rundown of the results, in order of preference.

—K. Y. M.

## TASTING RESULTS

Dried tomatoes listed in order of preference; prices may vary.



### 2 VICTORIA

\$4.59 (7½ ounces)  
Packed in canola and olive oils

These rich, red tomatoes had a long oval shape and an appealing “cheeky plumpness.” The texture was “pleasantly chewy but not at all leathery.” And the tomato flavor was pure and sweet but lacked the intensity we expect from dried fruit.



### 3 CALIFORNIA SUN-DRY

\$4.99 (8½ ounces)  
Packed in canola and extra-virgin olive oils

“The reddest of them all,” these fleshy tomatoes most resembled fresh tomatoes in shape and texture. Their concentrated tomato flavor was good, but the herb seasonings, while not entirely unpleasant, obscured the fruit.



### 4 HOGUE FARMS

\$7.99 (8 ounces)  
Packed in canola and olive oils

These intriguing dark and wrinkled dried tomatoes packed “a sweet-tangy flavor” with lots of deep, dried-fruit intensity. But they were “considerably harder to cut and chew” than some of the others.



### 5 BELLA SUN LUCI

\$4.69 (6½ ounces)  
Packed in olive oil

These California tomatoes had a rich red hue but a mushy, fall-apart texture. The flavor was reminiscent of tomato paste, with a pronounced, lingering acidity.



### 6 L'ESPRIT

\$5.99 (8 ounces)  
Packed in canola and extra-virgin olive oils

These dark, dry tomatoes from Virginia's Shenandoah Valley were quite chewy (some tasters said “leathery”) with a concentrated salty, tangy flavor that wasn't very tomatoey.

## top pick



### ALESSI

\$5.19 (7 ounces)  
Packed in extra-virgin olive oil

The definitive favorite, this brand was praised for being “plump and meaty”—tender enough to cut and chew with ease—and having a “sweet, rich dried-tomato flavor,” free of distracting seasonings. A hint of smokiness and a deep brick-red color added to the appeal.





## Piña Colada Upside Down Cake

1 cup	Arrowhead Mills® Enriched Unbleached White Flour
¼ cup	Arrowhead Mills® Perfect Harvest Flour
1 cup	Hain® Organic Brown Sugar
2 tsp	Baking powder
½ tsp	Hain® Sea Salt
¾ cup	Milk or Westsoy® Soymilk
¼ cup (1 stick)	Hain® Safflower Margarine
1	Egg, or egg replacer
1 tsp	Rum essence

Mix all ingredients together in large mixing bowl. Beat on high for 2 minutes.

Preheat oven to 350°F. In 8" square baking dish, melt:

¼ cup (1 stick) Hain® Safflower Margarine

### SPRINKLE WITH:

½ cup Hain® Organic Brown Sugar

1 - 8 oz can Crushed pineapple, drained

½ cup Shredded coconut

Pour batter over pineapple/coconut mixture and bake for 35-40 minutes, or until done.

Serve warm with ice cream.

*Variation:*  
Substitute 3 packages Arrowhead Mills® Instant Oatmeal (any flavor) for pineapple and coconut, and replace rum essence with vanilla.



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READER SERVICE NO. 76



**Beef Stew** p. 36  
**& Braising Vegetables** p. 46

For 4-quart enameled cast iron pots, ideal for both beef stew and braised vegetable recipes, try Chef's Resource (866-765-2433; [www.chefsresource.com](http://www.chefsresource.com)). We like Staub and Le Creuset brands.



**Carrot Cake** p. 50  
 Straight-sided, heavy-duty, 9x13-inch cake pans are sold in many supermarkets, but if you'd like a higher-quality version, order a Parrish brand cake pan (\$11.95) from [Cooking.com](http://Cooking.com) (800-663-8810). For excellent walnut oil, try J. LeBlanc brand, \$15 at [Chefshop.com](http://Chefshop.com) (877-337-2491).

**Marinara** p. 52  
 Nancy Verde Barr recommends San Marzano tomatoes (the brand name doesn't matter, but be sure that the label says "San Marzano,"

not "San Marzano type" and that they're imported from Italy). Compare prices, as these tomatoes are often on sale. Good mail-order sources include Todaro Bros. Specialty foods (877-472-2767; [www.todarobros.com](http://www.todarobros.com)) and Salumeria Italiana (800-400-5916; [www.salumeriaitaliana.com](http://www.salumeriaitaliana.com)). A 28-ounce can costs about \$3.50.

Muir Glen organic tomatoes are available in natural-foods stores and some supermarkets.

**Foccacia** p. 58  
 Look to The Baker's Catalogue ([www.kingarthurflour.com](http://www.kingarthurflour.com); 800-827-6836) for 13x18-inch rimmed baking sheets (also known as half sheet pans), parchment, Silpat baking mats, and bread flour.

Kitchen Krafts (800-776-0575; [www.kitchenkrafts.com](http://www.kitchenkrafts.com)) sells a 5-pound bag of unbleached bread flour for \$3.75, as well as curved plastic bowl scrapers for \$1.25.

**Equipment** p. 20  
 For both Polder timers, the Oregon Scientific timer, and the CDN on a Rope, see [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com). Visit [www.williams-sonoma.com](http://www.williams-sonoma.com) for the Galleon timer. For the BonJour timer, visit [www.kitchenetc.com](http://www.kitchenetc.com).

**World Cuisines** p. 22  
 For ingredients like Chinese rice wine, soy sauce, sesame oil, oyster sauce, and extra-long-grain rice, visit [Ethnicgrocer.com](http://Ethnicgrocer.com).

**From Our Test Kitchen** p. 68  
 Kalustyan's (800-352-3451; [www.kalustyans.com](http://www.kalustyans.com)) carries several types of couscous, including fine-grain, medium-grain, Israeli, Lebanese, and Jordanian varieties. (For a source for the Oxo juicer, see below.)

**Lemon Desserts**  
 p. 62

Visit A Cook's Wares (800-915-9788; [www.cooksware.com](http://www.cooksware.com)) to find the Oxo Good Grips citrus juicer (\$12.90), Microplane graters for zesting lemons (from \$9.50), dough scrapers for cutting the lemon squares (from \$6.90), and the 5-hole Henckels zester for making a lemon zest garnish (\$6.99).

Dress up the Silky Lemon Pudding with candied violets, available at [Cheftools.com](http://Cheftools.com). Silver dragées and other garnishes for the Triple-Lemon Layer Cake are sold at Sweet Celebrations (800-328-6722; [www.sweetc.com](http://www.sweetc.com)).



**Lemon curd**

It's easy to make your own lemon curd, but a good jarred one can be an alternative to serve with the Lemon Tea Cake or Silky Lemon Pudding (see "Lemon Desserts," p. 62), or even on toast. (But we don't recommend using a jarred lemon curd in the Triple-Lemon Cake recipe.) We sampled a num-

ber of brands, and though many were downright awful (tasting overly harsh and of preservatives), these three were pleasing; choose one that suits your taste. **Elizabethan England:** Sticky consistency with a pleasant, fresh lemon juice flavor. **Thursday Cottage:** Sweet and buttery, with a hint of lemon zest. **Stonewall Kitchen:** Thick and custard-like.

Elizabethan England lemon curd, 7.5 ounces, \$7.99, and Thursday Cottage lemon curd, 312 grams, \$6.99, both available at The British Shoppe ([www.thebritishshoppe.com](http://www.thebritishshoppe.com); 203-245-4521). Stonewall Kitchen fresh lemon curd, 11½ ounces, \$8.50, at [www.stonewallkitchen.com](http://www.stonewallkitchen.com); 800-207-5267.







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# nutritioninformation

Recipe	Page	Calories		Protein	Carb	Fats (g)				Chol.	Sodium	Fiber	Notes
(analysis per recipe)		total	from fat	(g)	(g)	total	sat	mono	poly	(mg)	(mg)	(g)	
World Cuisines	22												
Shrimp Fried Rice (Chau Fan)		280	100	13	31	11	2	5	4	160	850	1	based on 6 servings
Beef Stew	36												
Classic Beef Stew		480	250	34	15	28	10	14	1	110	700	4	based on 8 servings
Chicken in a Flash	40												
Chicken with Spiced Tomato, Caper & Olive Sauce		380	180	33	15	20	3	13	2	85	1460	2	based on 3 servings
Chicken with Tarragon & Vermouth		410	210	31	6	24	9	12	2	115	560	0	based on 3 servings
Chicken with Potatoes, Peas & Coconut-Curry Sauce		440	220	36	19	25	12	6	5	85	630	4	based on 3 servings
Chicken with Marsala, Mushrooms & Gorgonzola		510	280	36	9	31	12	15	3	130	760	1	based on 3 servings
Polenta	44												
Basic Soft Polenta		120	40	2	18	4.0	2.5	1.0	0.5	10	780	2	based on 6 servings
Mascarpone & Parmigiano Polenta		190	90	7	18	10	5	4	1	25	970	2	based on 6 servings
Polenta Rosa (Tomato Polenta)		110	10	3	23	1.0	0	0.5	0.5	0	910	2	based on 6 servings
Braised Vegetables	46												
Braised Carrots & Shallots		200	100	3	24	11	4	6	1	10	750	4	
Braised Winter Vegetables		170	80	3	21	9	4	4	1	15	300	7	
Potatoes Boulangère		260	110	6	30	12	4	6	1	10	540	3	
Carrot Cake	50												
Carrot Cake		670	420	8	58	47	17	15	12	120	440	2	based on 15 servings
Marinara	52												
Marinara Sauce		90	40	3	13	4.5	0.5	3.0	0.5	0	1130	3	per cup
Mediterranean Sausage Ragoût		430	200	11	38	22	7	11	3	45	1550	9	based on 6 servings
Pan-Seared Steak Pizzaiola		480	310	27	14	34	14	16	2	100	1220	3	
Braised Chicken With Marinara, Lemon & Olives		590	340	42	21	38	9	20	7	140	1250	5	based on 4 servings
Spicy Clams & Sausage in Marinara		350	110	20	32	13	3	7	2	50	880	3	based on 6 servings
Basil Marinara		550	140	15	89	15	2	10	2	0	850	7	
Arrabbiata Sauce		630	190	21	90	21	5	12	3	25	1410	7	
Mock Bolognese Ragù		620	270	32	49	30	14	11	2	115	1020	5	
Pink Sauce		580	410	8	36	45	28	13	2	150	750	2	
Puttanesca Sauce		360	150	10	45	17	2	11	2	5	1340	5	
Focaccia	58												
Basic Focaccia		250	80	6	36	9	1	7	1	0	310	1	based on 15 pieces
Anise-Raisin Focaccia Topping		60	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	based on topping 15 pieces
Lemon Desserts	62												
Gingered Lemon Bars		140	60	2	18	7	4	2	0	55	45	0	per bar
Silky Lemon Pudding		460	160	7	68	18	10	7	1	255	160	0	
Lemon Tea Cake		230	80	4	34	9	5	3	0	60	180	1	based on 12 servings (without curd)
Lemon Curd		90	50	1	8	6	3	2	0	75	15	0	per tablespoon
Triple-Lemon Layer Cake		870	400	6	115	44	27	11	2	240	240	1	based on 10 servings
From Our Test Kitchen	68												
Spiced Couscous Pilaf with Almonds, Currants & Mint		210	70	6	30	8	1	5	1	0	330	3	based on 6 servings
Quick & Delicious	82C												
Broiled Salmon with Stewed White Beans, Bacon & Kale		700	430	46	19	47	12	24	7	145	1060	5	
Singapore Noodles		690	350	36	47	39	4	22	11	95	1250	3	
Seared Scallops with Fennel & Spinach Salad		260	110	26	13	12	2	8	1	45	770	4	
Rosemary Steaks & Potatoes		880	430	75	32	48	24	17	2	255	740	3	
Spinach & Parmesan Stuffed Mushrooms		230	160	6	10	18	5	11	1	20	470	1	about 4 mushrooms
Shanghai Stir-Fried Beef & Broccoli		360	230	23	9	26	6	13	5	50	1600	3	
Manle-Thyme Roast Chicken		650	320	59	19	36	9	15	9	190	660	0	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of Del Mar, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the

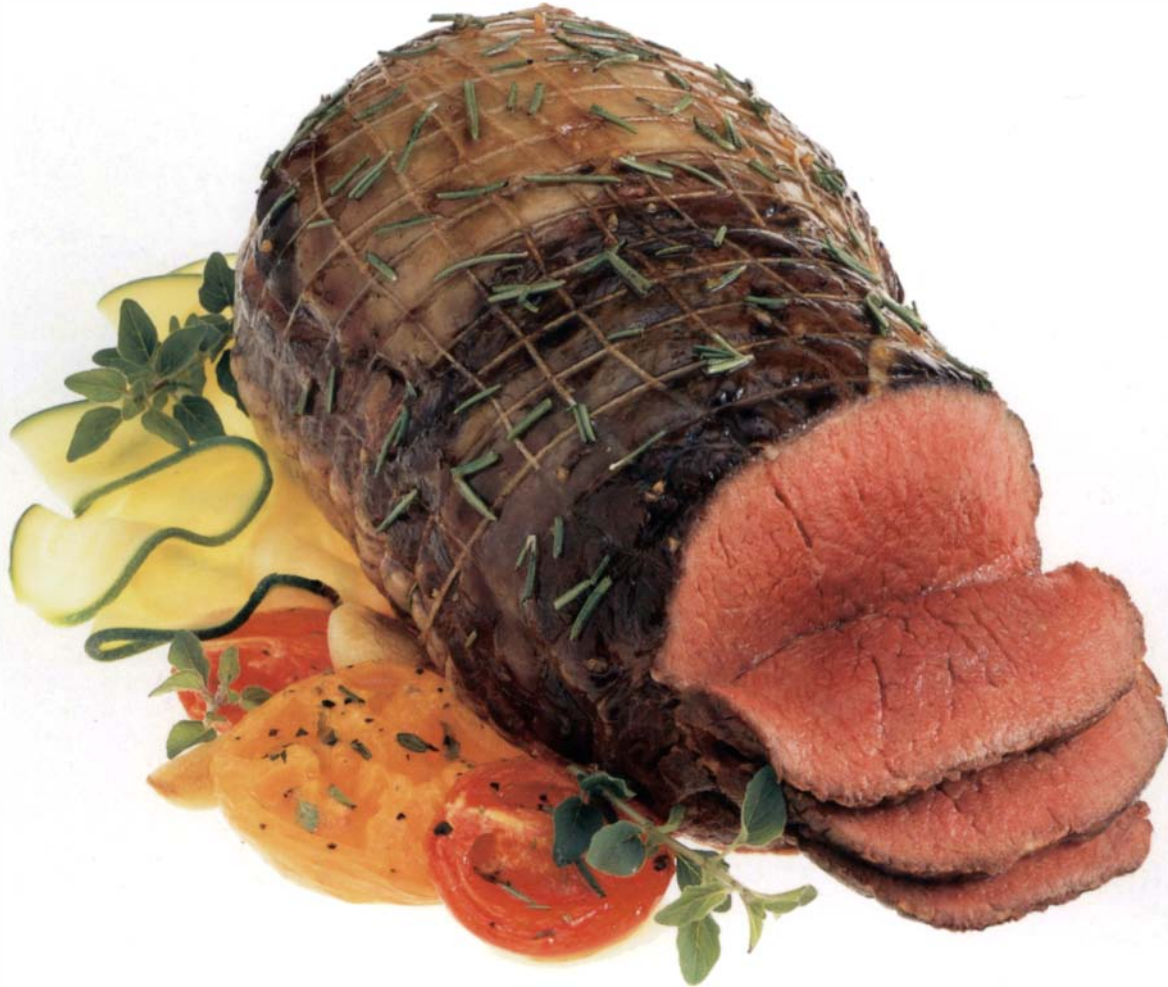
calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used. When the

quantity of salt and pepper aren't specified, the analysis is based on ¼ teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper per serving for entrées, and ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper per serving for side dishes.



# AUSTRALIAN LAMB

*easy as one, two, three*



**ONE** LEG OF AUSTRALIAN LAMB AND ONE TABLESPOON OF DRIED ROSEMARY



**TWO.** CUT SLITS IN LAMB, INSERT SIX GARLIC CLOVES



**THREE** TABLESPOONS OF OLIVE OIL.

**SENSATIONAL!**

Enjoy the no-fuss preparation of this **Classic Leg of Lamb** recipe. It's a whole new take on how to do the holidays - so easy! Then, while it roasts, there's plenty of time to savor the irresistible aromas of your holiday dinner. In one bite, you'll know why no other lamb compares in flavor. A pure, all-natural diet ensures the sweet and mild taste of Fresh Australian Premium Lamb. Visit our website to find more quick and easy lamb recipes.



**Australian Lamb.**

For this Classic Leg of Lamb recipe and others, please visit [www.australian-lamb.com/fc](http://www.australian-lamb.com/fc). Also, check out the listing of retailers near you.

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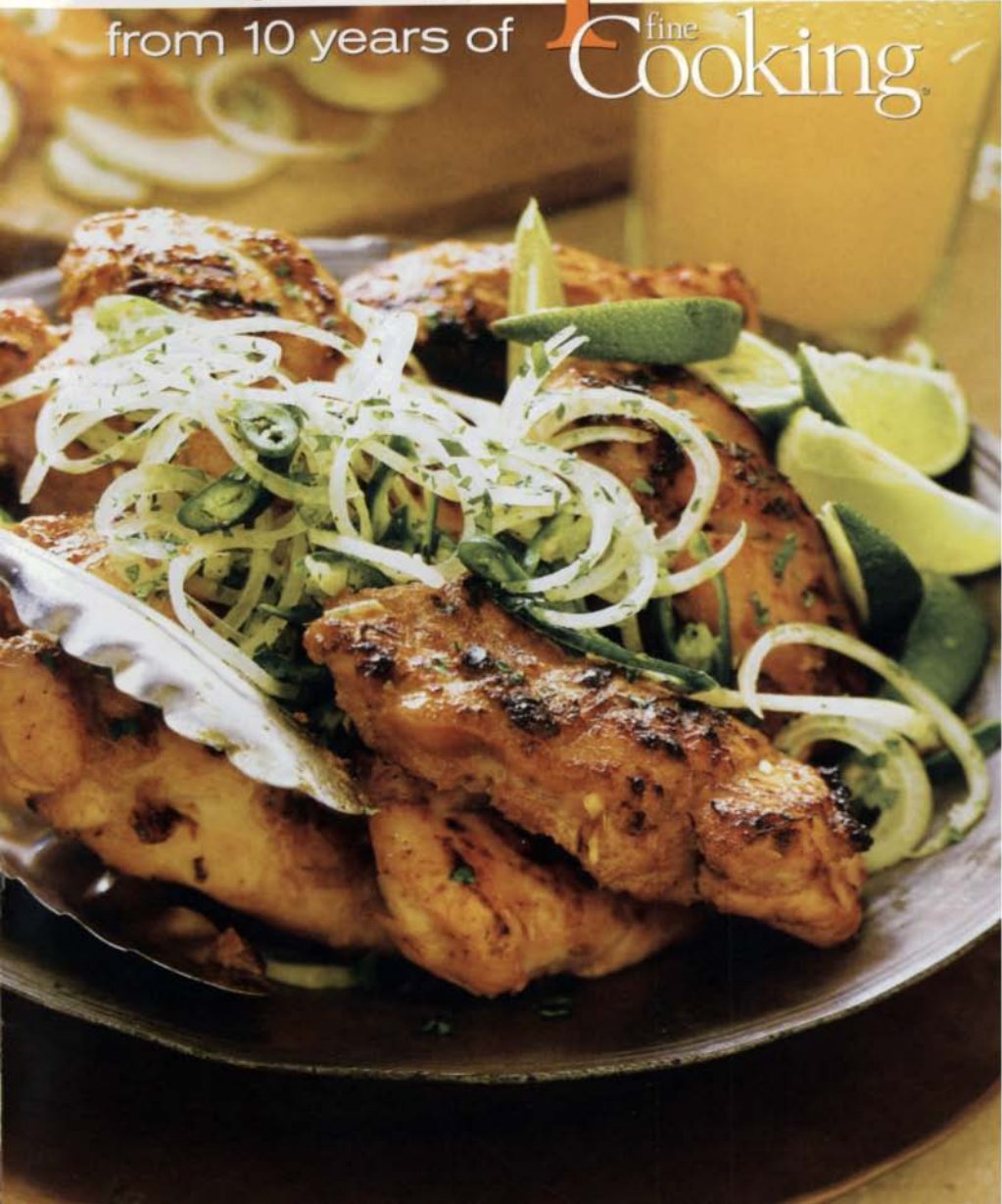


Thank you for sharing 10 years of great cooking.



# Favorite Recipes

from 10 years of *fine* Cooking



# Favorite Recipes

from 10 years of *fine* Cooking

What's your favorite *Fine Cooking* recipe? To celebrate our tenth anniversary, we asked readers and staff to answer that question. Judging by the enthusiastic response, everyone had fun paging through those sauce-splattered, well-worn back issues—giving us lots of votes for the top all-time favorites. The results are here: a special collection of 14 terrific recipes from our first ten years, together in one place. We know they'll become a part of your repertoire...if they haven't already.

—the editors

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# Chinese-Style Spareribs



As a party appetizer or a substantial meal, these dry-rubbed roasted ribs are easy to make and high on flavor. Stacking the ribs makes a festive presentation for entertaining.

*Serves four to six as a main course or six to twelve as an appetizer. Yields ½ cup spice rub and about ⅔ cup sauce.*

**FOR THE CHINESE SPICE RUB:**

**2 tablespoons ground coriander**  
**2 tablespoons hot chili powder**  
**2 tablespoons dark brown sugar**  
**1 tablespoon five-spice powder**  
**1 tablespoon ground fennel seeds**  
**1 tablespoon kosher salt**  
**1 teaspoon dried red chile flakes**

**FOR THE RIBS:**

**2 full (13-rib) racks of St. Louis-cut pork spareribs (about 3 pounds each; ask the butcher to remove the breastbone and adjacent strip of fatty joints)**

**Kosher salt**

**FOR THE ASIAN DIPPING SAUCE:**

**¼ cup soy sauce**  
**2 tablespoons granulated sugar**  
**2 tablespoons rice vinegar**  
**1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger**  
**1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil**

**Sliced scallions for garnish**

**M**ake the spice rub: In a small bowl, stir together all the ingredients.

**Cook the ribs:** Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F. Sprinkle and press ¼ cup

of the rub on both sides of each rib rack. Put the racks, meaty side up, on a broiling pan or a wire roasting rack set over a baking sheet. Lightly season the ribs with salt and put them in the oven. After the first hour, rotate the pan every 30 minutes (If you use two baking sheets, switch their position in the oven, too.) The ribs will sizzle gently as they cook, and they'll become tender after about 2 hours in the oven.

To test for doneness, pick up the center of the ribs with tongs; the ends of the ribs should flop downward (this means the fat and cartilage have broken down), and a skewer inserted between the ribs should meet little resistance. If the meat between the ribs is still tough, keep cooking, checking every 15 minutes and rotating the pan.

**Meanwhile, make the dipping**

**sauce:** In a medium saucepan over medium heat, bring the soy sauce, sugar, rice vinegar, ginger, and sesame oil to a simmer, stirring occasionally. Remove from the heat and let cool to room temperature. The sauce will keep for about a week in the refrigerator.

**Cut and serve:** When the ribs are done, remove them from the oven, put them on a cutting board meaty side down (so they're easier to slice), and slice them into individual ribs. Arrange on a platter and serve with the sauce on the side. Or, stack the ribs, drizzle with some of the dipping sauce (serve the rest on the side), and garnish with the sliced scallions.

—Steve Johnson



# Chicken & Tortilla Soup



Hot broth, cool avocado, crunchy tortilla strips—a fun and flavorful combination.

*Serves two as a light main course.  
This recipe is easily doubled.*

**1 tablespoon vegetable or olive oil, plus another ½ to 1 cup for frying the tortillas**

**¼ cup finely chopped onion**

**1 tablespoon chili powder; more to taste**

**1 tablespoon tomato paste**

**2 skinless chicken thighs (bone-in or boneless)**

**Kosher salt to taste**

**4 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**

**Fresh cilantro: six 2-inch stems for the broth, plus ¼ cup roughly chopped leaves for the garnish**

**4 fresh corn tortillas, 6 inches across, cut into ¼-inch-wide strips**

**½ cup corn kernels (canned is fine)**

**½ cup canned black beans, rinsed and drained**

**¾ cup diced fresh tomato**

**1 ripe avocado, diced and tossed with a squeeze of lime juice**

**¼ cup crumbled queso fresco, feta, or ricotta salata**

**Sour cream for serving**

**Lime wedges for serving**

**P**ut 1 tablespoon of the oil in a large saucepan or small soup pot, add the onion, and cook over medium heat until the onion has softened but not browned, about 3 minutes. Add the chili powder and tomato paste and stir with a wooden spoon to mix and cook briefly; don't let the chili powder scorch.

Season the chicken thighs lightly with salt and nestle them in the chili paste, turning them once so they're

entirely coated. Pour in about ½ cup of the broth and adjust the heat to a simmer. Cover the pan and cook the chicken, turning once, until it's extremely tender when pierced with a knife, 30 to 40 minutes (add a little more broth if the pan is drying out). Remove the chicken from the pan, let it cool a bit, and cut or shred it into bite-size pieces, discarding any bones, fat, or gristle; set aside.

If there's any visible grease in the pan, spoon it off. Add the remaining broth and the cilantro stems and simmer, uncovered, until the broth has reduced by about one-third and is quite flavorful, 20 to 30 minutes.

While the broth is reducing, fry the tortilla strips. Line a plate with two layers of paper towels. In a small, high-sided saucepan, pour in enough oil to come to about a 1-inch depth. Heat the oil over medium heat; when it reaches 375°F or when a strip of tortilla sizzles immediately when dipped in the oil, add six to eight strips of tortilla. With tongs or a long fork, "scrunch" them for a second or two so they take on a wavy shape. Fry until the strips aren't bubbling much and have turned pale brown, about 1 minute. Transfer to the paper towels. Repeat with the remaining strips.

Divide the shredded chicken, the corn, black beans, tomato, and tortilla strips between two large shallow bowls. Reheat the broth if necessary so it's piping hot and pour it over the ingredients in the bowls. Serve immediately, and let each diner add the avocado, cheese, sour cream, chopped cilantro, and a big squeeze of lime juice at the table.

—Martha Holmberg



## Sear-Roasted Salmon Fillets with Lemon-Ginger Butter



Searing the salmon gives it a golden crust; high-temperature roasting finishes the cooking and keeps the fish moist.

*Serves four.*

**6 tablespoons butter, well softened at room temperature**  
**2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice, warmed slightly**  
**2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger**  
**2 tablespoons snipped fresh chives**  
**Olive oil for the pan**  
**4 salmon fillets (5 ounces each), skinned if you like, patted dry**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**

In a bowl, combine the butter, lemon juice, ginger, and chives and blend well. Set aside at room temperature.

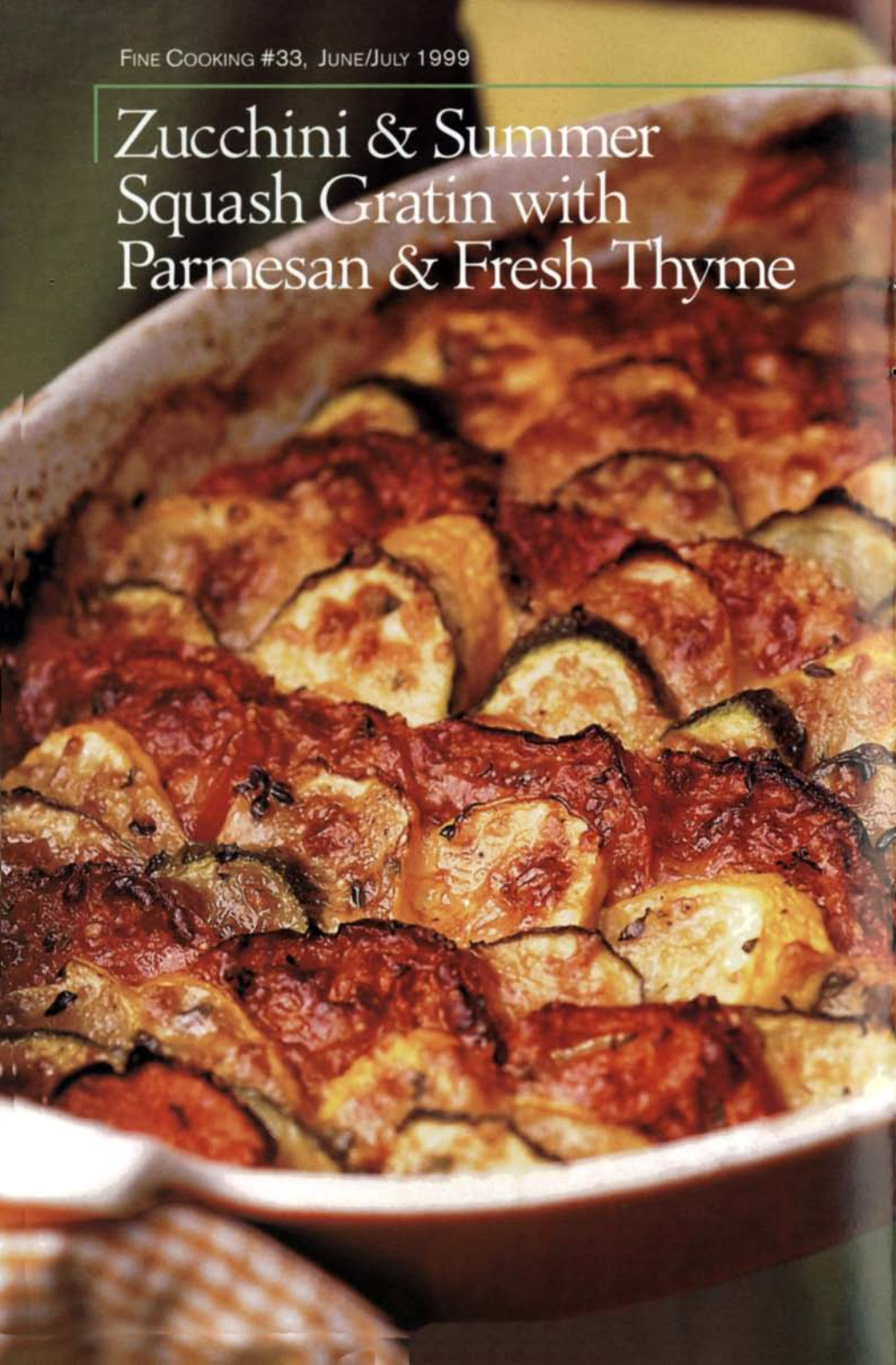
Heat the oven to 500°F. Set a large ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat and add just enough oil to make a light film. Sprinkle the salmon lightly with salt and pepper. When the oil is very hot, add the salmon fillets, skin side up, and cook until nicely browned, about 1 minute. Flip the fish over and put the skillet in the oven. Roast for 2 minutes for medium rare; 4 minutes for medium well. Check for doneness with the tip of a knife. Remove the pan from the oven, transfer the salmon to dinner plates, and immediately top each fillet with a dab of the lemon-ginger butter.

—Isabelle Alexandre





# Zucchini & Summer Squash Gratin with Parmesan & Fresh Thyme



When the garden overflows with summer squash and tomatoes, this gratin comes to the rescue. It's even better on the second day.

*Serves six to eight as a side dish; four as a main dish.*

**FOR THE ONIONS:**

**2 tablespoons olive oil**  
**2 medium onions (14 ounces total), thinly sliced**

**TO ASSEMBLE THE GRATIN:**

**1 ¼ pounds small ripe tomatoes, cored and cut into ¼-inch slices**  
**¾ pound (about 2 small) zucchini or other green summer squash, cut into ¼-inch slices on the diagonal**  
**¾ pound (about 2 small) yellow summer squash or golden zucchini, cut into ¼-inch slices on the diagonal**  
**3 tablespoons olive oil**  
**¼ cup fresh thyme leaves**  
**Kosher salt**  
**1 ¼ cups freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano**  
**Freshly ground black pepper**

**Cook the onions:** In a medium skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onions and sauté, stirring frequently, until limp and golden brown, about 20 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low if they're browning too quickly. Spread the onions in the bottom of an oiled 2-quart shallow gratin dish (preferably oval). Let cool.

**Assemble and bake the gratin:**

Heat the oven to 375°F. Put the tomato slices on a shallow plate to drain for a few minutes and then discard the collected juices. In a medium bowl, toss the zucchini and squash slices with 1 ½ tablespoons of the olive oil, 2 tablespoons of the thyme, and ½ teaspoon salt. Reserve half of the cheese for the top of the gratin. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon of the thyme over the onions in the gratin.

Starting at one end of the baking dish, lay a row of slightly overlapping tomato slices across the width of the dish and sprinkle with a little of the cheese. Next, lay a row of zucchini, overlapping the tomatoes by two-thirds, and sprinkle with cheese. Repeat with a row of squash, and then repeat rows of tomatoes, zucchini, and summer squash, sprinkling each with cheese, until the dish is full.

Season lightly with pepper and ½ teaspoon salt. Drizzle the remaining 1 ½ tablespoons olive oil over all. Combine the reserved cheese with the remaining 1 tablespoon thyme and sprinkle this over the whole gratin. Bake until well browned all over and the juices have bubbled for a while and reduced considerably, 65 to 70 minutes. Let cool for at least 15 minutes before serving.

—Susie Middleton



# Chicken Thighs Baked with Lemon, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme



Crisp skin and juicy meat are the trademarks of this clever dish. Lemon slices and fresh herbs, plus a paste of garlic and olive oil, infuse the chicken with heady flavors.

*Serves six.*

**2 large cloves garlic**  
**Kosher salt or sea salt**  
**3 to 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**  
**12 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs, trimmed of excess fat, rinsed, and patted dry**  
**2 large lemons, each cut into six ¼-inch rounds**  
**12 pieces fresh rosemary sprigs, each 2 inches long**  
**12 pieces fresh thyme sprigs, each 2 inches long**  
**12 fresh sage leaves**  
**Freshly ground black pepper**

Using a mortar and pestle, mash the garlic with a large pinch of salt to create a coarse paste (or use a small mixing bowl and the back of a spoon, or mince the garlic with the salt very finely on a cutting board). Add the oil very slowly in drops while pounding and grinding the paste, continuing until the mixture is thick, creamy, and emulsified. Put the chicken in a bowl. Rub the garlic paste all over the chicken, including under the skin. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or overnight.

Position an oven rack in the middle of the oven; heat the oven to 425°F. Arrange the lemon slices in one layer in a large shallow roasting pan or baking dish (9x13 inches is good). Top each slice with a piece of rosemary and thyme and a sage leaf. Set the chicken thighs, skin side up, on top; sprinkle generously with salt and pepper. Bake until the chicken's skin is golden and the juices run clear when the chicken is pierced, 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Sometimes the lemons and chicken produce a lot of juices, in which case you can make a delicious pan sauce. Transfer the chicken (keeping the herbs and lemon slices underneath) to a plate and cover loosely with foil. Tilt the pan to pool the juices in one corner. Spoon off the fat that rises to the top. Set the pan over medium heat (if the pan isn't flameproof, pour the juices into a small skillet) and scrape up any cooked-on juices. Let the juices boil and reduce so they thicken to a saucy consistency. Drizzle the sauce around, not on, the chicken to maintain the crisp skin.

—Bill Devin



# Arroz Verde (Green Rice)



Fresh cilantro and spinach lend all their virtues—bright flavors, aromas, and color—to this Mexican rice pilaf. Milk and chicken broth add a subtle richness.

*Serves six to eight.*

**½ cup tightly packed fresh cilantro sprigs**  
**1 cup tightly packed fresh stemmed spinach leaves (about 1½ ounces)**  
**1¼ cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**  
**1¼ cups milk**  
**1 teaspoon kosher salt**  
**3 tablespoons unsalted butter**  
**1 tablespoon olive oil**  
**1½ cups long-grain white rice**  
**¼ cup finely minced onion**  
**1 clove garlic, minced**

**P**ut the cilantro, spinach, and broth in a blender and blend until the vegetables are puréed. Add the milk and salt and blend a bit more until well combined.

In a medium (3-quart) heavy-based saucepan with a lid, heat the butter and olive oil over medium heat. When the butter is melted, add the rice and sauté, stirring about every 30 seconds, until it just begins to turn golden, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the onion and garlic and cook 1 minute, stirring constantly. Add the contents of the blender, stir well, turn the heat to high, and bring to a boil. Cover the pan, turn the heat to very low, and cook for 20 minutes. Stir the rice carefully to avoid crushing it, cover, and cook for another 5 minutes. Take the pan off the heat and let the rice steam in the covered pot for 10 minutes. Serve hot.

—Jim Peyton



Photos: left, Martha Holmberg; right, Scott Phillips.



# Classic Crumb Cake



The brown sugar topping is the star of this moist coffee cake. Go easy on the mixing when making the cake batter to get the most tender result.

*Serves twelve.*

**FOR THE CRUMB TOPPING:**

**12 ounces (1 ½ cups) unsalted butter; more for the pan**  
**¾ cup packed light brown sugar**  
**½ cup granulated sugar**  
**1 ½ teaspoons ground cinnamon**  
**¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg**  
**Pinch table salt**  
**12 ounces (2 ⅔ cups) all-purpose flour**

**FOR THE CAKE:**

**9 ounces (2 cups) all-purpose flour**  
**¾ cup granulated sugar**  
**1 teaspoon baking powder**  
**½ teaspoon table salt**  
**1 large egg**  
**¾ cup milk**  
**1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**  
**Reserved ½ cup melted unsalted butter**  
**1 tablespoon confectioners' sugar for dusting**

**M**ake the topping: Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a large saucepan, melt all the butter; remove from the heat. Pour ½ cup into a measuring cup and reserve for mixing the cake batter. Add the brown sugar, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt to the saucepan. Stir with a fork, pressing when needed, until there are no lumps of sugar. Add the flour and stir gently until well blended and crumbly. Set aside.

**Make the cake:** Lightly butter a 9x13-inch baking pan. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. In a medium bowl, whisk the egg, milk, and vanilla with the reserved ½ cup melted butter until combined. Pour the liquids over the dry ingredients and gently stir until just blended. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread evenly.

Break up the crumb mixture with your fingers and sprinkle it evenly and generously over the cake batter. Bake until the top is lightly browned, the cake springs back when lightly pressed in the center, and a pick inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean, about 35 minutes. Let cool on a rack and dust with the confectioners' sugar. Serve warm or at room temperature.

—Abigail Johnson Dodge



# Sautéed Boneless Pork Chops with Orange-Dijon Pan Sauce



Follow this method for perfectly sautéed pork chops, and get a snappy pan sauce, too. This recipe works equally well with chicken or turkey cutlets.

*Serves four.*

**1 tablespoon oil**  
**3 tablespoons unsalted butter**  
**4 boneless pork chops,**  
**1 to 1¼ inches thick**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground**  
**pepper to taste**  
**All-purpose flour for dredging**  
**½ cup orange juice**  
**1 teaspoon Dijon mustard**  
**½ teaspoon minced fresh rosemary**

**H**eat the oil and 2 tablespoons of the butter in a heavy 12-inch skillet over low heat. Season the pork chops with ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper and then dredge them in the flour.

Increase the heat to medium high. When the flecks of milk solids from the butter begin to turn golden brown, put the pork in the pan. Sauté, turning once, until golden on both sides and just cooked through, 6 to 7 minutes total. Transfer the pork to heated plates. Return the skillet to medium-high heat. Add the orange juice, Dijon, and rosemary. Boil rapidly until the liquid reduces to about ¼ cup. Tilt the skillet so that the reduced liquid is at one side of the pan and whisk in the remaining 1 tablespoon butter. Taste the sauce and adjust the seasoning as necessary. Spoon the sauce over the pork and serve immediately.

## **Variation:**

### **Mustard Cream Pan Sauce**

Use ½ cup low-salt chicken broth in place of the orange juice and, instead of the Dijon and rosemary, use 2 tablespoons coarse-grained mustard. Finish the sauce by whisking in 2 tablespoons heavy cream in place of the butter.

## **Variation:**

### **Port & Dried Cherry Pan Sauce**

Use ½ cup port in place of the orange juice and, instead of the Dijon and rosemary, use 2 tablespoons dried cherries and 2 teaspoons seedless raspberry jam or red currant jelly. Finish the sauce by whisking in 1 tablespoon butter.

—Pam Anderson



# Classic Roasted Potatoes



These crisp-creamy potatoes are everyone's favorite and a foolproof side dish. Be sure to give the potatoes plenty of room in the roasting pan so they roast rather than steam.

*Serves four to six.*

**2 pounds medium- to low-starch potatoes (such as Yukon Gold, Red Bliss, or all-purpose white), left whole if very small, halved or cut into chunks if larger**  
**3 tablespoons olive oil, melted unsalted butter, or duck fat**  
**1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme or rosemary (optional)**  
**1 teaspoon kosher salt**  
**Plenty of freshly ground black pepper**

**H**eat the oven to 375°F. Spread the potatoes in a single layer in a medium roasting pan or in a rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with the oil or melted butter, season with the herbs, salt, and pepper, and toss to coat well. Roast, tossing with a spatula a few times to prevent sticking, until the potatoes are very tender throughout and the skins are somewhat shriveled, browned, and crisp, 50 to 60 minutes, depending on their size and variety. Serve hot.

## **Variation:**

### **Herb-Roasted Potatoes**

Following the basic recipe at left, use olive oil for the fat and toss the potatoes with 2 tablespoons of any combination of chopped fresh rosemary, thyme, savory, marjoram, and sage. Roast as directed. As soon as the potatoes are done, toss with the juice of 1 lemon and 3 tablespoons of any combination of chopped fresh parsley, chives, or chervil.

## **Variation:**

### **Roasted Potatoes with Mustard & Rosemary**

Following the basic recipe at left, replace the oil and thyme with a mixture, whisked together, of  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup plus 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup olive oil, 1 tablespoon dry vermouth (or other dry white wine), 2 cloves minced garlic, 1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary, 1 teaspoon kosher salt, and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

—Molly Stevens



## Seared Asparagus with Lemon & Parmesan Curls



Seared for flavor and steamed for tenderness, these simply cooked asparagus spears are an excellent match to just about any fish or meat entrée.

*Serves four as a side dish.*

**¼ teaspoon grated lemon zest**  
**1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice**  
**2½ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**  
**1 pound large asparagus (about 16 spears), woody ends snapped off, spears peeled and cut in half crosswise**  
**1 clove garlic, peeled and smashed**  
**1 large shallot, cut into ¼-inch disks**  
**Pinch dried red chile flakes**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**¼ cup water; more if needed**  
**10 shavings (2 inches long) Parmigiano Reggiano**

Combine the lemon zest, lemon juice, and ½ tablespoon of the olive oil in a small bowl; set aside. Turn on the exhaust fan and heat a heavy 12-inch skillet or large wok over high heat for 2 minutes. When the pan is hot, pour in the remaining 2 tablespoons oil. A few seconds later, add the asparagus, garlic, shallot, and chile flakes; season well with salt and pepper. Cook, shaking the pan often, until the asparagus begins to brown and shrivel slightly, 3 to 4 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low, carefully add the water (it will steam), and cover the pan with the lid ajar. Cook until the asparagus is just tender, 3 to 4 minutes. (If the water evaporates before the asparagus is done, add more, 1 tablespoon at a time.) Drizzle the lemon mixture over the asparagus. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Transfer the asparagus to a small serving dish and top with the Parmigiano curls. Serve immediately.

—Tony Rosenfeld



## Capellini Capricciosi (Spicy Capellini)



Follow up this hearty pasta with an arugula salad. Peperoncini are hot, pickled peppers, sold in the supermarket near the pickles and relishes.

*Serves six.*

**1/3 cup olive oil**  
**8 slices bacon, chopped**  
**2 medium onions, thinly sliced**  
**10 peperoncini, drained, seeded, and chopped**  
**35-ounce can whole peeled Italian tomatoes, drained and roughly chopped**  
**Kosher salt**  
**1 pound dried angel hair pasta**  
**3/4 cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano**  
**1/3 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)**

In a large, nonreactive skillet, heat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the bacon and cook until lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 15 minutes.

Add the peperoncini, tomatoes, and 1/2 teaspoon salt. Simmer for about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook until al dente, about 3 minutes. Drain the pasta and toss it with the remaining olive oil. Stir in the sauce. Add the cheese, toss well, and serve immediately, garnished with the parsley, if you like.

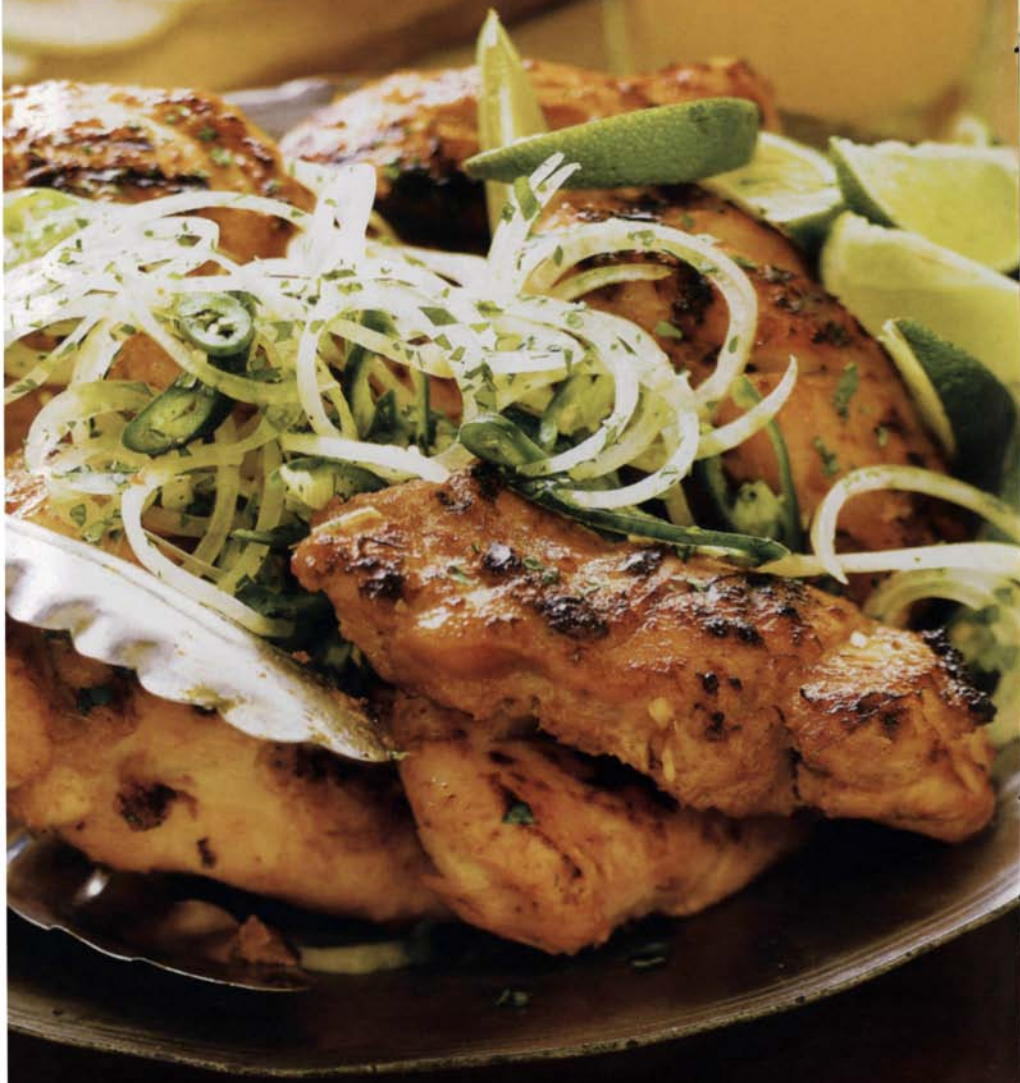
—Lidia Bastianich

Photos: left, Brian Hagiwara; right, Scott Phillips.





# Tandoori Chicken



No need for a tandoor oven for this succulent chicken—a red-hot grill does a great job. The yogurt-lime marinade helps tenderize the chicken and lets the aromatic spices soak in.

*Serves four to six.*

FOR THE MARINADE:

**2-inch piece ginger, peeled**  
**4 large cloves garlic**  
**¼ teaspoon turmeric**  
**1 teaspoon chili powder**  
**1½ teaspoons table salt**  
**½ teaspoon cumin seeds, ground**  
**¾ cup plain low-fat yogurt**  
**1 tablespoon fresh lime juice**

FOR THE CHICKEN:

**2 to 3 pounds boneless chicken thighs and breasts**  
**¼ cup melted butter or olive oil**

FOR THE GARNISH:

**½ mild white onion, thinly sliced**  
**½ cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves**  
**1 or 2 fresh green chiles, thinly sliced**  
**1 lime, cut in wedges**

**M**ake the marinade: In a blender or a food processor, blend the ginger and garlic to a fine paste (you may need to add a little water to make a paste). Add the turmeric, chili powder, salt, cumin, yogurt, and lime juice; process until combined.

**Prepare the chicken:** Remove the skin from the chicken, leaving some fat. Make a few slits in each piece

and transfer to a nonreactive dish large enough for the pieces to lie flat. Pour the marinade over the chicken and stir to coat the chicken thoroughly. Seal with plastic and marinate in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours but no more than 12 hours, turning the chicken once.

**Grill the chicken:** Prepare a charcoal grill with an even layer of coals. While the grill is heating up, take the chicken out of the refrigerator. When the charcoal is red-hot, lay the chicken pieces on the grill about 2 inches apart. Baste with any remaining marinade. Cover the grill, leaving the vents half-open. After about 5 minutes, remove the grill lid and turn over the chicken pieces; they should look slightly charred. Replace the lid and continue cooking for another 5 to 7 minutes. Uncover the chicken, baste it with the melted butter, turn it over, and leave it uncovered for the rest of the cooking time. Baste after 2 or 3 minutes and test for doneness: the meat should feel firm when you press it. Transfer the chicken to a large platter. Arrange the onion, cilantro, chiles, and lime wedges over the chicken and seal the platter with foil. Let the chicken rest for 10 minutes to absorb the garnish flavors. Traditional accompaniments are chutney, curried potatoes, peas, raita, and basmati rice.

—Leona Dalavai



# Tortilla Española (Spanish Potato Tortilla)



Like an omelet or a frittata, this satisfying dish is equally good for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or a snack.

*Serves four as a main course; twelve as an appetizer.*

**1¾ cups vegetable oil for frying**  
**1¾ pounds (about 5 medium) low-to medium-starch potatoes, like Yukon Golds, peeled and sliced ½-inch thick**

**Kosher salt**

**12 to 14 ounces onions (2 to 3 medium), diced**

**5 medium cloves garlic, very coarsely chopped (optional)**

**6 large eggs**

**½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper (optional)**

In a 10-inch nonstick skillet that's at least 1½ inches deep, heat the oil on medium high. Put the potatoes in a bowl and sprinkle on 2 teaspoons salt, tossing to distribute well.

When the oil is very hot (a potato slice will sizzle vigorously around the edges without browning), gently slip the potatoes into the oil with a skimmer or slotted spoon. Fry, turning occasionally and adjusting the heat so the potatoes sizzle but don't brown. Set a sieve or colander over a bowl. When the potatoes are tender, after 10 to 12 minutes, transfer them with the skimmer to the sieve.

Add the onions and garlic (if using) to the pan. Fry, stirring occasionally, until the onions are very soft and translucent but not browned (you might need to lower the heat), 7 to 9 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and, using the skimmer, transfer the onions and garlic to the sieve with the potatoes. Drain the oil

from the skillet, reserving at least 1 tablespoon, and wipe the pan with a paper towel so it's clean.

In a large bowl, beat the eggs, ¼ teaspoon salt, and pepper (if using) with a fork until blended. Add the drained potatoes, onions, and garlic. Mix gently to combine, trying not to break the potatoes.

Heat the skillet on medium high. Add the 1 tablespoon reserved oil. Let the pan and oil get very hot and then pour in the potato and egg mixture, spreading it evenly. Cook for 1 minute and then lower the heat to medium low, cooking until the eggs are completely set at the edges, halfway set in the center, and the tortilla easily slips around in the pan when you give it a shake, 8 to 10 minutes. You may need to nudge the tortilla loose with a knife or spatula.

Set a flat, rimless plate that's at least as wide as the skillet upside down over the pan. Lift the skillet off the burner and, with one hand against the plate and the other holding the skillet's handle, invert the skillet so the tortilla lands on the plate. Set the pan back on the heat and slide the tortilla into it, using the skimmer to push any stray potatoes back in under the eggs as the tortilla slides off the plate. Once the tortilla is back in the pan, tuck in the edges to neaten them. Cook until a skewer inserted into the center comes out clean, hot, and with no uncooked egg on it, 5 to 6 minutes.

Transfer the tortilla to a serving platter and let cool for at least 10 minutes. Serve warm, at room temperature, or slightly cool, cut into wedges or small squares.

—Sarah Jay



# Triple Caramel Cake



A deceptively simple cake that's moist and rich. The caramel sauce does triple duty: It's mixed into the batter, drizzled over the cake, and folded into a whipped cream topping.

*Serves ten to twelve.*

**3 cups heavy cream**  
**2½ cups granulated sugar**  
**6 ounces (12 tablespoons) unsalted butter, softened; more for the pan**  
**4 large eggs, at room temperature**  
**2 cups all-purpose flour; more for the pan**  
**1½ teaspoons baking powder**  
**Pinch table salt**

## **M**ake the caramel sauce:

Pour 2 cups of the cream into a medium saucepan and slowly bring it to a boil. Lower the heat and keep at a bare simmer.

Put 1 cup of the sugar in a heavy-based medium saucepan over medium heat. Leave undisturbed until the sugar begins to melt and darken. Gently shake the pan to distribute the sugar and to keep the melted sugar from burning. When all the sugar has melted and the caramel is a very dark amber, remove from the heat. Carefully add the hot cream, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon. Don't worry if the caramel hardens; it will melt as the sauce boils. Return the pan to the heat and keep the sauce at a gentle boil for about 5 minutes, stirring constantly.

Set aside for at least 30 minutes, stirring often, until the sauce is cool. Measure 1 cup of the caramel to add to the cake batter and refrigerate the rest.

**Make the cake:** Heat the oven to 325°F. Butter and flour a 12-cup bundt pan. With an electric mixer, cream the butter and remaining 1½ cups of sugar until fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, waiting until each is incorporated before adding the next. Sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Gently but thoroughly fold the dry ingredients into the butter and eggs alternately with the reserved 1 cup caramel, beginning and ending with the dry ingredients.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake until a skewer comes out clean, 35 to 40 minutes. Set on a rack for about 10 minutes and then unmold and let cool completely on the rack. Bring the rest of the caramel sauce to room temperature. When the cake is cool, glaze it by drizzling half of the remaining caramel sauce over the top.

Whip the remaining 1 cup cream until it holds firm peaks. Gently fold in the remaining caramel, leaving streaks visible. Serve with the cake.

—Johanne Killeen & George Gernon





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## Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat up; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the time given in the recipe; use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not all home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them; see *Fine Cooking* #54, pp. 14-16).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

### Ingredients

Unless otherwise noted, assume that

- ◆ Butter is unsalted.
- ◆ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ◆ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ◆ Sugar is granulated.
- ◆ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.
- ◆ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.



A large collection of various kitchen tools and utensils, including spatulas, knives, blenders, and measuring cups, arranged in a grid-like fashion. The items are diverse in color and shape, representing a wide range of kitchen equipment. The text "...and we're just getting started." is overlaid on the image, suggesting that there are many more tools available. The website address "www.oxo.com" is visible at the bottom left corner.

**WWW.OXO.COM**



BY TONY ROSENFELD

**High heat** adds flavor fast, so many of these recipes encourage you to cook with it, whether in a sauté pan on the stovetop, or on a baking sheet under the broiler. Searing with high heat is an excellent method for making easy, warming winter meals: It gives foods a nice browned crust, imparts deep, rich flavor, and gets dinner on the table quickly. Just remember to get your pan hot before sautéing and to turn on the exhaust fan so that you don't smoke up the kitchen.



## Broiled Salmon with a White Bean, Kale & Bacon Ragoût

*Serves four.*

**¼ lb. thick-cut bacon (about 4 thick slices), cut crosswise into thin strips**  
**3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**  
**2 cloves garlic, minced**  
**3 cups packed thinly sliced kale leaves (stems removed)**  
**1½ cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**  
**15½-oz. can cannellini beans, rinsed well and drained**  
**1½ lb. skinless salmon fillet, cut into 4 uniform pieces**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme**

Set an oven rack 6 inches from the top element and heat the broiler to high.

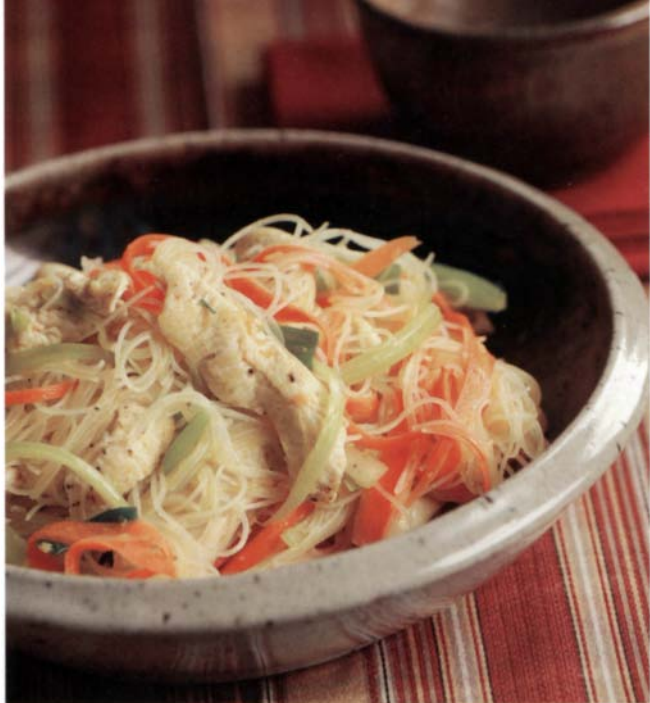
In a heavy skillet over medium heat, cook the bacon in the olive oil, stirring occasionally, until the bacon renders much of its fat and starts to brown, about 5 minutes. Use a spoon to remove 2 Tbs. of the bacon fat from the skillet and reserve in a small bowl.

Add the garlic to the bacon in the skillet. Cook, stirring, until the garlic starts to sizzle, about 30 seconds. Raise the heat to high, add

the kale, and sauté, stirring, until it starts to wilt, about 1 minute. Add the chicken broth and beans and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium, cover the skillet, and cook for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and keep warm.

While the beans are cooking, line a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet with foil and arrange the salmon, skin side down, on it. Drizzle the reserved bacon fat over the salmon and season with ½ tsp. salt and a few generous grinds of black pepper. Broil until slightly firm to the touch, 7 to 10 minutes for medium (the salmon will be dark pink in the middle). Sprinkle half of the thyme over the salmon. Stir the remaining thyme into the beans and kale and season with salt and pepper to taste.

To serve, spoon equal portions of the beans and kale onto dinner plates and top each with a piece of salmon. Serve immediately.



## Singapore Noodles

Serves two.

- 3 oz. thin rice noodles (to yield about 2 cups when cooked)**
- 1 inner rib celery**
- 1 large carrot, peeled**
- 12 oz. boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 2 small)**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 tsp. hot (Madras) curry powder**
- 1 tsp. granulated sugar**
- 5 Tbs. canola or peanut oil**
- 5 scallions, greens cut in 1-inch pieces, whites thinly sliced (keep separate)**
- 1 Tbs. minced or finely grated ginger**
- 1 Tbs. soy sauce**

Bring 2 quarts salted water to a boil. Remove from the heat, add the rice noodles, and let soak until they're just tender, 5 to 10 minutes (or follow the instructions on the package). Drain the noodles well and set on a plate lined with paper towels.

Cut the celery into 4-inch pieces and then slice lengthwise into thin strips. Use a vegetable peeler to shave the carrot into thin strips. Holding your knife parallel to the cutting board, slice the chicken breasts in half (to create thin cutlets) and then cut crosswise into long, thin strips.

Season the chicken with  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. salt and a few grinds of pepper.

Combine the curry powder, sugar, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. salt in a small bowl and set aside. Heat 2 Tbs. of the oil in a large skillet or wok over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add the chicken to the skillet and stir-fry until the chicken has lost all of its raw color, about 2 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a bowl or plate. Heat the remaining 3 Tbs. oil in the skillet and add the scallion whites and ginger; stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the celery, carrot, scallion greens, and curry mix, and stir-fry for 30 seconds to soften slightly. Add the drained noodles and the chicken and toss until the noodles have turned an even pale yellow and are hot throughout, about 2 minutes (scrape the bottom of the pan if necessary). Toss with the soy sauce, taste for seasoning, and serve immediately.

**Tip:** If you want to double this recipe, stir-fry it in two batches to avoid crowding the pan.



## Seared Scallops with Wilted Fennel & Spinach Salad

Serves four.

- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 medium bulb fennel (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb.), trimmed, quartered, cored, and cut lengthwise into  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch slices**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 5 oz. fresh baby spinach (about 5 cups)**
- 1 large navel orange**
- 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. "dry" sea scallops (see p. 72), trimmed of their abductor muscles and dried well**
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. chopped fresh thyme**

Set a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat for 1 minute. Add  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Tbs. of the oil, swirl it in the skillet, and add the fennel. Season with  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. salt and a few grinds of pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the fennel wilts and starts to brown, about 4 minutes. Add  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water to the skillet, cover, reduce the heat to medium, and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until the fennel is just tender, about 4 minutes. Stir in the spinach and toss until it wilts, about 1 minute. Remove from the heat and keep warm.

While the fennel is cooking, slice the ends off the

orange with a small, sharp knife. Stand the orange on one of its cut ends and slice off the skin in strips (try to get all the bitter white pith). Working over a small bowl, cut the orange segments free from the membrane, letting each segment fall into the bowl as you go. Squeeze the empty wheel of membranes over the bowl to release any remaining juice.

Set a large cast-iron pan or a heavy 12-inch skillet over high heat for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  minutes. Season the scallops with  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. salt and a few generous grinds of pepper. Add the remaining  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Tbs. oil to the skillet, swirl it in the pan, and add the scallops. Cook without moving for 3 minutes. Gently flip the scallops and cook until they're well browned and almost completely firm to the touch, 1 to 2 minutes. Sprinkle the scallops with the thyme. Portion the fennel mixture onto four dinner plates, top with the scallops and orange segments, and drizzle with the orange juice. Serve immediately.





## Rosemary Steak & Potatoes

*Serves two.*

**2 beef strip steaks, 1¼ to 1½ inches thick (about 1½ lb. total), trimmed**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**4 Tbs. unsalted butter**  
**1 large russet potato, scrubbed and patted dry**  
**Cooking spray**  
**1 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary; plus four 2-inch sprigs**

Heat the broiler to high and set a rack directly under it. Season the steaks with 1 tsp. salt and a few grinds of pepper.

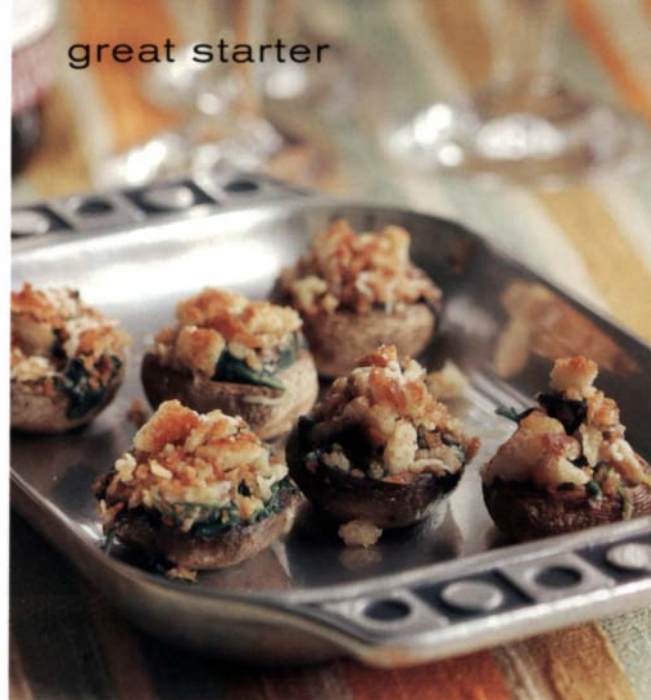
Melt 2 Tbs. of the butter. Cut the potato crosswise into thin, uniform slices about ⅛ inch thick. Spray a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet with cooking spray. In a large bowl, gently toss the potato slices with the melted butter, chopped rosemary, ½ tsp. salt, and a few generous grinds of black pepper.

Arrange the potato slices in a single layer on the baking sheet and broil until they begin to brown, 2 to 4 min-

utes. Flip and broil until the second sides are lightly golden brown and the potatoes are slightly crisp around the edges, 3 to 5 minutes. Set aside and keep warm.

Set a heavy skillet over high heat for 1½ minutes. Carefully set the steaks in the pan and sear without moving for 2 to 3 minutes. Flip the steaks and cook for another 2 to 3 minutes for medium rare. Remove the pan from the heat and add the remaining 2 Tbs. butter and the rosemary sprigs to the pan. Let the steaks rest in the pan for 5 minutes, basting them occasionally with the pan juices. Carve the steaks into ¼-inch slices and sprinkle with salt.

Arrange the steak and potatoes on two dinner plates and drizzle the steak with the rosemary-butter pan sauce. Serve immediately.



## Spinach & Parmesan Stuffed Mushrooms

*Serves six as an appetizer; yields about 24 mushrooms.*

**1 lb. medium white mushrooms (about 24), wiped clean**  
**5 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**3 slices white sandwich bread**  
**4 scallions (white and green parts), thinly sliced**  
**¼ cup dry sherry**  
**6 oz. fresh baby spinach, roughly chopped**  
**¼ cup heavy cream**  
**⅓ cup plus 1 Tbs. freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano**  
**½ lemon**

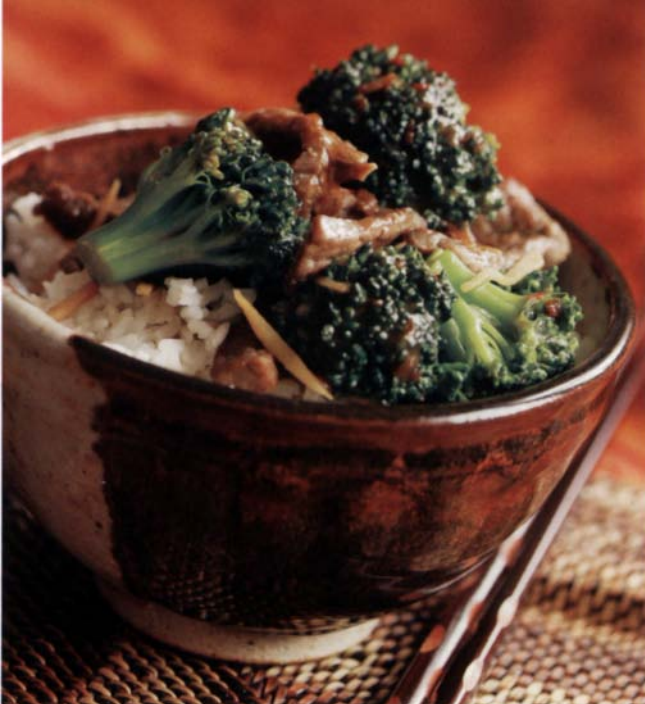
Set an oven rack 6 inches from the top element and heat the broiler to high. Completely remove the mushroom stems; thinly slice the stems. Set the mushroom caps stem side up on a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet, drizzle with 1½ Tbs. of the oil, and sprinkle with ½ tsp. salt and a few grinds of pepper. Broil until the mushrooms are brown and completely tender, 6 to 7 minutes.

Pulse the bread in a food processor until it forms uniform crumbs. In a large, heavy sauté pan, heat 2 Tbs. of the oil over medium-high heat. Add the breadcrumbs and ¼ tsp. salt, and cook, stirring

constantly, until the breadcrumbs crisp and turn light brown, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate and wipe the pan clean. Return the pan to high heat, add the remaining 1½ Tbs. oil and the scallions, and sauté until browned and softened, about 2 minutes. Add the mushroom stems and ½ tsp. salt. Cook, stirring, until the stems soften and brown, about 3 minutes. Add the sherry and cook until almost evaporated, 30 to 60 seconds. Add the spinach and stir until it wilts, about 1 minute. Add the cream and ⅓ cup Parmigiano, reduce the heat to medium, and cook until the cream reduces slightly, about 2 minutes. Taste for salt and pepper; let cool.

Discard any liquid that may have accumulated in the mushroom caps. Mound the spinach mixture into the caps; top with the breadcrumbs (press them into the filling) and the remaining 1 Tbs. Parmigiano. (The mushrooms can be prepared to this point for up to two days ahead and chilled.)

Heat the broiler to high. Broil the caps until the breadcrumbs brown a little more and the mushrooms heat through, 1 to 3 minutes. Squeeze the lemon half over the caps. Serve immediately.



## Shanghai Stir-Fried Beef & Broccoli

Serves four.

**1 small flank steak** (1 ¼ to 1½ lb.)  
**3 Tbs. soy sauce**  
**1 Tbs. dry sherry**  
**1 Tbs. cornstarch**  
**Kosher salt**  
**¾ lb. broccoli crowns**, cut into 2-inch florets (to yield about 4 heaping cups)  
**¼ cup canola or peanut oil**  
**2 cloves garlic**, peeled and smashed  
**2-inch piece ginger**, peeled and cut into thin matchsticks  
**¼ tsp. red chile flakes**  
**2 Tbs. oyster sauce**

Bring 2 quarts water with 2 tsp. kosher salt to a boil.

Slice the steak in half lengthwise and then cut crosswise into thin slices. In a medium bowl, stir 1 Tbs. of the soy sauce with the sherry, cornstarch, and ½ tsp. salt. Add the steak, toss to coat, and let sit for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, blanch the broccoli in the boiling water until it softens to a tender crunch, 2 to 3 minutes. Drain

in a colander and then rinse under cold water until the broccoli cools.

Set a large, heavy skillet or a large wok over high heat for 1 minute. Pour in 2 Tbs. of the oil and, when it starts to shimmer, add the beef. Cook the beef, stirring frequently, until it loses most but not all of its raw color, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a large plate. Add the remaining 2 Tbs. oil and the garlic, ginger, chile flakes, and ¼ tsp. salt. Stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the broccoli and 3 Tbs. water and cook, stirring to incorporate any browned bits on the bottom of the pan, until the broccoli warms through, about 1 minute. Stir in the beef, the oyster sauce, and the remaining 2 Tbs. soy sauce; cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Serve immediately.

quick-prep, hands-free roast



## Maple-Thyme Roast Chicken

Serves four.

**4-lb. whole chicken**, rinsed and patted dry  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**⅓ cup pure maple syrup**  
**2 Tbs. vegetable oil**  
**2 Tbs. balsamic vinegar**  
**1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme**  
**⅓ tsp. cayenne**

Position a rack in the upper third of oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Set the chicken on a cutting board, breast side down. Use kitchen shears to cut along both sides of the backbone to remove it. Flip the chicken over and press down on the breasts with the heels of your hands to flatten it a little. Rub ¾ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper all over the chicken and set it breast side up in a 9x13-inch baking dish (the chicken should fit snugly).

In a small bowl, whisk the maple syrup, oil, vinegar, thyme, and cayenne with 1 tsp. salt. Pour the mixture

evenly over the chicken.

Sprinkle the chicken with ¼ tsp. salt and several grinds of black pepper. Roast the chicken, basting or brushing it occasionally with the pan juices, until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the deepest part of the thigh registers 170° to 175°F, 45 to 50 minutes. (Keep an eye on the pan juices; if they seem to be burning, add a couple of tablespoons of water to the bottom of the pan.)

Let the chicken rest for a few minutes, cut it into pieces, drizzle it generously with the pan juices, and serve immediately.

### Serving suggestion:

**Serve with roasted potatoes and sautéed greens.**